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THE SWORD HUNTERS; or, THE LAND OF THE ELEPHANT RIDERS.

BY CAPT. FREDERICK WHITTAKER.

AUTHOR OF "LANCE AND LASSO," "THE WILD HORSE HUNTERS," "THE DUMB PAGE," "THE SEA-CAT," ETC., ETC.



JACK CURTIS THREW UP HIS RIFLE AS HE GALLOPED BY WITHIN TEN FEET OF THE BULL HE AND MANUEL HAD HIT BEFORE.

The Sword Hunters;

OR,

The Land of the Elephant Riders.

A Sequel to "Lance and Lasso."

BY CAPT. FREDERICK WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF "THE WILD HORSE HUNTERS," "THE DUMB PAGE," "THE SEA-CAT," "LANCE AND LASO," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THREE OLD FRIENDS.

A dark, dirty sky, with a raw, chilly wind blowing, and a short, choppy sea underfoot, through which the snorting steamer plunged and rolled, dashing the white spray in clouds as high as her mast-head. Such was the scene that met the eyes of a youth, with black eyes and hair, who stood on the quarter-deck of the steamer *Imperatrice*, of the Messageries Imperiales, bound from Marseilles to Algiers.

The young man had the general appearance of a Spaniard, and did not belie his looks, for he came of Spanish descent, but had been born and educated in America. He was wrapped up in a heavy cloak of thick, rough cloth, with a pointed hood which was drawn over the black astrachan cap which he wore.

He was alone on the quarter-deck of the steamer, and paced quickly up and down, humming an air from a French opera, and watching the dim, misty outline of the distant coast of Africa, far ahead.

The captain of the steamer stood on the bridge between the paddle-boxes, wrapped up to the eyes, while a few French sailors stood here and there about the deck, shivering, with their hands in their pockets.

Presently a head appeared at the companion-hatch, as another youth, hardly more than a boy, came on deck, his slouched hat pulled down and his collar turned up to his ears.

The new-comer was a well-grown, stout boy of sixteen, with a square bluff face, that looked the picture of reckless daring, while his broad, sturdy frame seemed to bid defiance to hardship.

"Hello, Wiseman," he called out in English, with a strong accent that told of the Western lad, "what air you moping about, up hyar? Pickle's as sick as a dog down-stairs, and wants to be put ashore. He'll never make a sailor, I reckon."

"He won't need to be sick, long Plug," said the young man, smiling. "There's Algiers ahead now. We'll be at anchor before night."

The lad with the queer name looked ahead through the driving spray before he said:

"Glad of it. I like a ship well enough, but we've had so much of this old steamer that I'd just as soon get ashore again. And then there's old Pickles; I hate to see him looking so miserable. I wonder if it'll be as cold at Algiers, Wiseman?"

"The captain says no," replied Wiseman. "This cold wind is what he calls the *mistral*, and it blows three days only. When it's over, they get warm weather. See, yonder, where the clouds are breaking. We shall have fine weather before we get into Algiers, or I mistake much."

"Plug," as his companion often called him, looked knowingly at the clouds. There was a little spot of blue sky in the south, which was spreading rapidly over the heavens, and even while Wiseman was speaking, the wind began to abate and vary in direction.

A few minutes after it had ceased entirely, while the short choppy sea began to abate.

"Here comes the sirocco," remarked Wiseman, a little later, as a puff of warm air struck their faces, coming from the south. "Now we'll have warm weather, inside of half an hour."

And it turned out that he was right.

Long before they had sighted the white walls and houses of Algiers, the sky was bright and clear, the clouds driven away to the north, and a warm wind that felt as if it came from the mouth of an oven, was blowing in their faces, while the motion of the vessel had diminished to a gentle swell.

On went the steamer *Imperatrice* at a rapid pace, her paddles beating the water into clouds of spray, and as the sky cleared and the sea abated, the passengers who had been so sea-sick began to come up on deck.

Among them was a tall, handsome, fair-haired boy of seventeen, who was at once addressed by our two friends as "Pickles," and who looked quite pale, as if he had recently suffered from sea-sickness as badly as any, which he had indeed.

Doubtless those of our readers who have followed the fortunes of the heroes of "Lance and Lasso" must have recognized by this time the personages with the queer names whom we have introduced.

They were none other than our old friends Tom Bullard, Jack Curtis, and Manuel Garcia, with their old schoolboy nicknames of "Plug," "Pickles," and "Wiseman," on board the French steamer bound for Algiers, only a little older and a very little wiser than when they chased and were chased by the children of the Chaco.

"And how came they there?" our readers may ask.

Well, the story is soon told. You may read part of it in Manuel's dress now, for he has thrown off the heavy capote as the weather waxes warmer, and one can see that he is in deep mourning.

It is true. Manuel is in mourning, and for the best friend he ever had or ever will have, none other than his father.

Don Luis Garcia has passed away, seized by a sudden fever, and he left to Manuel all the large fortune which he possessed.

"But why?" you may ask, "is he in the French Algerian steamer, and what is he doing there?"

There, again, his father's influence has led him, active even in death.

Don Luis, in dying, left behind him a very singular will. After leaving his fortune to his son, and directing that Jack Curtis's father should act as executor and guardian for Manuel, he proceeded:

"And whereas I have all my life cherished an ardent desire to travel, and go where no civilized man has ever been before, which desire has been always thwarted by my inability to escape from business, I now wish my son Manuel to execute my desire in his own person, and to do that after my death which I once hoped to do with him. I wish him, during the years that elapse before he becomes of age, to follow out my design, and to travel, not on the continent of Europe, in the beaten tracks, where thousands have preceded him, but, in the regions where civilization has not yet penetrated. I wish my executor to furnish him with whatever funds he may require to prosecute his travels, and that he should explore some place where no white man had ever before been."

"I especially recommend that he should travel in Africa, the only continent now remaining of which we are not informed pretty fully, leaving him to select his own route, but trusting to him to pierce the veil of mystery that hangs over its central regions, and tell the world of the hidden countries."

The will went on to give minute directions as to the best way to proceed, according to the writer's notions, and concluded by recommending Manuel to take with him his "two friends, John Curtis and Thomas Bullard, in whose courage and good sense I have full confidence, having seen them both tried to the utmost under my own eye."

And thus it was that our three friends now found themselves on the steamer *Imperatrice*, bound for Algiers.

"Kitty" Ledoux had been left behind, much to his own discontent; but neither his father nor mother would allow him to go. They had been so much alarmed at the dangers he had run in the Gran Chaco, that they would not hear of his going. So that poor "Kitty" was compelled to stay at home, his father concluding that he had better enter his counting-house and learn business.

Jack Curtis and Bullard had no difficulty in following Manuel. Mr. Curtis was quite willing that his son should see as much of the world as possible before he was able to join him in business; and as for "Plug," his uncle John made no objection, especially since Manuel agreed that Tom should not be put to any expense larger than his usual allowance, which uncle John paid regularly out of the little fortune left by Tom's father.

Manuel, on account of being the eldest, had become, by tacit consent, the leader of the expedition. The others agreed with him in everything, and were only too glad to follow wherever he led, for they were sure to see new things and have plenty of excitement. It had been agreed between them that they should first go to Algiers, where, under French protection, they could learn the ways of the Arabs and some of their language, after which they were to proceed to Egypt and penetrate as far up the Nile as was possible, before striking west into the heart of Africa.

If you will look at the map of Africa, boys, you will see in its very center, far to the south of Lake Chad, a bare, yellow spot, which is even to-day marked "Unexplored country." It does not seem very large, and yet if you look at the numbers of the degrees of latitude and longitude which inclose it, you will find that it is a square of about ten degrees, or in other words nearly seven hundred miles, a country as large as France, Spain and Italy put together, or the whole of our States of Missouri, Arkansas, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio and Virginia.

It was this great country, never yet traveled over by European, that had excited Don Luis's curiosity, and to explore which he had once hoped to take Manuel. Now Manuel and his two friends were going to try to find it, in obedience to his wish. In Algiers they were to learn how to travel in Africa.

Now, as the steamer plowed her way onward, they began to see the coast of Africa more plainly. Far in the distance a rugged chain of mountains with white tops rose against the blue sky. Near by, the brownish line of a sandy coast, backed by green hills, was visible; and the white walls and houses of the city of Algiers were in sight.

There was Algiers, a great square town surrounded by fortifications, spread over the side of a steep slope down to the very edge of the water. The slender shafts of minarets, tall towers with pointed tops like spear heads, the minarets themselves circled by little balconies, warned them that they were approaching a Mohammedan city.

These minarets were grouped in fours, around great round domes covered with gilding, and shining in the bright sunlight.

"What are those for, Wiseman?" asked Tom Bullard, who, like most American boys, knew little of the East.

"They are the minarets of the *mosques*, or Arab churches," said Manuel. "The Mohammedans have no bells, but they call people to prayers from the balconies of the minarets. They have a certain order of priests, called *muezzine*, who go up on the minarets five times a day, and call out so that they can be heard all over the city. We shall soon hear them."

Half an hour later the steamer was moored at the quay, and our friends were ashore, surrounded by a

motley crowd of Arabs, Maltese, French, and all the other nationalities that are mixed up in a great hodgepodge in Algiers.

A neat French *commissionnaire*, or hotel runner, soon took charge of them and their baggage, and in a short time they were comfortably installed in the Hotel de Paris, surrounded by French comfort and luxury, while below their windows lay the picturesque Arab town, so strangely unlike everything they had ever seen.

The white-aproned French waiter had disappeared with a civil intimation that dinner would be ready in ten minutes, and our friends were thinking about dressing for it, when they heard coming through the open window the deep, mellow tones of a man's voice, loud and sonorous, chanting a peculiar song, which seemed to come from high up in the air. It was taken up, far and near, in all directions, till the melodious chorus floated away over the house-top while the buzz of the street below was instantly hushed.

"It is the call to prayer," whispered Manuel, reverently.

Then they looked from the window, and perceived that the hotel was directly under the shadow of a great mosque, and there, on the balcony of a slender minaret, stood a grave, long-bearded Moor chanting the solemn summons to prayer.

They could catch some of the words of the long chant.

"*Allah hu akbar! Allah hu akbar! Allah hu akbar!* *Mohammed rasoul Allah!*" and more that they could not make out.

"God is great! God is great! God is great! Mohammed is the prophet of God! Come to prayer, oh true believers! Prayer is better than sleep."

Such was the translation which they obtained from the hotel *commissionnaire*, who understood the language of the place.

The boys could see from the windows, the poor simple Arabs and Moors, whom they had hitherto looked upon as dirty beggars, on their knees, wherever they happened to be when the call was sounded, saying their prayers without any false shame. The Frenchmen shrugged their shoulders and passed on, but our boys could not help being struck with the piety of these poor Mohammedans, and liking them all the better for it.

The fact is, that there are many of us who might take a lesson from the Arab, without suffering any harm from it.

"And now, fellows," said Jack Curtis, that evening, after they had strolled over the town, to see all that was to be seen, "what is the first thing for us to do?"

"What do you say, Tom?" asked Manuel, smiling.

"I say, go for the lions," said Tom, shortly.

"But where shall we find them?" asked Jack, doubtfully.

"Ask the French officers," answered Plug, sententiously. "They ought to know."

"But while we're hunting lions," suggested Manuel, "we're not traveling."

"What's the difference?" demanded Tom. "We've got to learn Arabic, and the lions are all among the Arabs. We'll be killing two birds with one stone, and learning how to behave in Africa."

"Your idea is not bad," decided Manuel, thoughtfully; "but how are we to find out where to go?"

"Send for the landlord," ordered Tom, and he pulled the bell.

The host came when summoned, and was at once surprised and interested in the subject.

"But, messieurs," he pleaded, deprecatingly, "you do not know what our Algerine lions are. They are terrible, and all the Arabs fear them. I do not wish to offend you, messieurs, but you're all very—very—"

And the polite landlord shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"You mean young and rash," added Manuel, smiling. "We admit it, monsieur, but we have made up our minds to kill a few lions before we leave Algiers. Is there any one here can tell us where to find them, think you?"

"But, certainly," persisted the landlord. "There is the captain, Bouchard, who lost an arm by a lion's jaws last year, when the beast killed five soldiers, and charged a whole regiment before he was killed. And there is Colonel Legal, and General Yusuf, all in town now, any one of whom can tell you all about it."

"Enough," said Manuel. "I have a letter to Colonel Legal myself. We will go and see him to-night."

And so it was settled.

CHAPTER II.

THE OULED CASSIM.

The news soon spread about the city that three Americans had come to hunt lions, and the boys became the object of much curiosity. The French officers of the different regiments fraternized with them, and gave them much valuable information as to the habitat of the lion, and how to find him. Through the kindness of Colonel Legal, of the Spahis (Irregular native cavalry), they were enabled to purchase good horses at a reasonable price, and had reason to rejoice at their good fortune in having letters to this officer, during the progress of many a subsequent hunt. Three horses were of the Barb breed, not very large. Fourteen and a half to fifteen hands was the tallest. But they were put together like giants. Close-ringed and round-barreled, with large muscular quarters and delicate little heads, their large, soft, dark eyes were the index of the spirit and endurance of those noble animals.

Manuel Garcia's horse was a dapple gray; Bullard rode a bay stallion, mottled with black; and Jack

Curtis's steed was as fine a chestnut as ever was foaled.

They had engaged an Arab muleteer to accompany them, and their baggage was loaded on his mules. For themselves, they caroaled gayly ahead on the road to Constantine, their Mexican spurs, with their huge rowels and jingling bells, attracting the attention of all the ragged Moors and Arabs in the neighborhood.

They took the road to Constantine and traveled leisurely thither, passing the romantic defiles of the Atlas, and enjoying the magnificent scenery. They camped every night, pitching their comfortable little tent, and enjoying the gipsy life hugely. At last they arrived at Constantine, a terrifically situated mountain fortress, surrounded by beetling precipices, thousands of feet deep, and from thence pursued their way to Guelma, the former home of Gerard, the lion-killer.

The fame of our friends preceded them all along the track, and when they arrived at Guelma, no less than three deputations of Arabs were waiting for them. Since the departure of the great Gerard, it appeared that the lions had been greatly on the increase, and the flocks and herds of the Arabs had been much harassed. The lion-killer had gone to Europe, and thence on an expedition up the Nile for the British government, and no one had been found to take his place for three years. The Arabs, hearing of the strangers from beyond the sea, had come to find what manner of men they were.

I think they must have been disappointed if they expected anything imposing. Manuel was the only one of the party who boasted of more than seventeen years, and they all looked very youthful.

Jack Curtis wore his fair hair in curls, floating over his shoulders, and his velvetine shooting dress and jaunty, gold-tasseled cap, made him look more like an actor on a spree than a grim lion-killer.

The old Arab chief glanced contemptuously at him, and did not seem much more satisfied to see Bullard. His dress was that of a regular backwoodsman, made of gray deer-skin, fringed with Indian bead-work and porcupine quills, and all the paraphernalia of Western finery. The Arab looked equally disgusted with him, inasmuch as Bullard was just at that moment laughing uproariously at the antics of one of the mules, which was tormented by a gad-fly. The Arab never laughs, and judges it unworthy of a man to do so. Hence his contempt for Bullard.

The old man seemed to think he had a bad job on his hands, and would get through it as quick as he could. He made a long speech in Arabic, which was translated by our friends' muleteer into French, and from which they learned that a large lion had been ravaging their flocks for some months, and that if they would only kill him the Arabs would be their slaves forever.

Manuel promised for his party that they would visit him at once, and the old chief retired, when the other two deputations delivered their messages. They were of similar import. So that our boys were quite likely to have lions enough on their hands. The nearest *douar* or Arab encampment, which had been persecuted by the lion, lay at the foot of the Atlas, toward the south, about twenty miles off. Thither the boys determined to proceed at once. They did not pitch any camp at Guelma, as they had at first intended, but rode through the place, accompanied by a large cavalcade of Arab horsemen, the deputation from the Ouled Cassim, or sons of Cassim, as their friends of the first deputation were called. In the evening they reached the *douar*, and found the head sheikh, Mohammed Ben Cassim, ready to receive them. Huge fires were blazing, and an ox was roasting in front of the sheikh's tent.

Here they were entertained with true Arab hospitality, and all the camp crowded to see the strangers.

"Queer-looking dicks those Arabs are!" remarked Bullard. "Out in Texas the men wear the breeches, and the women the petticoats; but here I'm hanged if they don't all wear petticoats together, only the women have 'em the shortest."

"Very bad taste in the sheikh," grumbled Curtis, "to let all these fellows come and stare at us while we're eating. I never knew before what it was to dine in state, but if this is like it, I don't want to repeat the operation."

"I don't care for that," declared practical Tom. "I only wish I could get a quiet chat with one of those lovely little creatures in the blue dresses, if you can tell them dresses."

"It's as much as any of them wear here," replied Jack. "You'll see we'll have offers of the whole tribe, and their daughters, if we kill the lion for them."

"Whew! how many wives do they allow a fellow here?"

"As many as he can support," Manuel smilingly answered.

"Why, that's as liberal as old Brigham himself."

"Hush, boys," ordered the gentlemanly Manuel. "It's not polite to keep the talk to ourselves. Let's have a talk with the sheikh. Ismail, ask the sheikh what time the lion usually comes!"

"Allah is great, and Mohammed is his prophet," replied the old Arab, sentimentally. "Who can tell me when the seigneur shall visit his slaves? In the darkness and tempest you will hear his voice, and when the moon has hid her face. But whether he is here now, or whether he come in the morning, he will not let you hear him before he comes. The seigneur is the king, and we are his slaves."

"The seigneur is not *my* king," said Curtis, when this answer was translated to him. "Tell the sheikh that we are Americans, and have no king. That we laugh at kings, and have made the British lion put his tail between his legs and run, before this."

"Allah kerim!" exclaimed the sheikh, when he heard this. "You have caused a lion to run from you? He could not have been one of our lions though. Our lions will charge an army alone."

"They're not a circumstance to the British lion," replied Jack, coolly. "He feeds on Frenchmen wherever he can find them, and the only thing that can whip him is the American eagle."

"But no eagle is large enough to kill a lion," objected the sheikh, not understanding the allusions of Jack.

"Our eagle is," declared Curtis. "You shall see to-morrow morning that we will kill your seigneur."

"If you can do that," exclaimed the old sheikh, impressively, "I will kiss your feet and be your slave, and you shall have the most beautiful maiden in the tribe for your wife."

"Thank the sheikh for his kindness, Ismail, and ask him if he'll clear the tent; we're getting very sleepy," were Manuel's orders.

The hospitable old gentleman immediately rose, and made a short harangue in Arabic, which had the effect of clearing the tent of all the men in a few minutes. The women were more curious, especially the old and ugly ones. It was evidently their intention to watch the strangers going to bed, (to see if their clothes formed part of their bodies, as Ismail informed them.) Tom Bullard settled the question by coolly commencing to take off his leather hunting-shirt. The old sheikh laid hold of a big stick at this, and advanced to drive out the women. Manuel Garcia, with all the chivalry of his nature, was yet so shocked at the indelicacy of the women, that he offered no interference, and they were soon driven out, while our friends were left in peace to sleep.

How long they rested they could not tell, but it must have been for some time. Manuel dreamed that he was out in a thunder-storm, with the heavy peals deafening his ears, when a louder clap than usual woke him. It was no dream. The sound of thunder was indeed in his ears, but it was the living thunder of the lion's great voice. It was reverberating all round, and he could not tell from what direction it proceeded. This peculiar property of the lion's roar has often been remarked by others. Bullard and Curtis still slept, but Manuel roused them out in quick time.

"Bullard, get up!" he cried. "Curtis, rouse up! Get your rifles and come out! Here's the lion!"

CHAPTER III. LASSOING A LION.

"Oh, hang the lion!" growled Tom, only half-awake; "let's go after him to-morrow. I want to sleep."

"Nonsense!" retorted Jack Curtis, sharply. "Wiseman's right. We must get up and go for him, or these Arabs will despise us."

Bullard shook himself and rose to his feet, and was soon as much awake as the rest. The tremendous voice of the lion, undoubtedly nearer, served to rouse them all fully, as the old sheikh peeped in at the tent-door. As he appeared, they all saluted forth and stood outside the tent-door.

The night was intensely dark, but looking to the east the boys could see a few faint streaks that looked like dawn.

It was unusual for the lion to come so late, but the moon had only just gone down, and it was owing to her presence that he had not appeared sooner. The fires were blazing furiously, and the Arabs were hurrying to and fro with loud cries, gun in hand. When the three friends came out, they attracted no attention whatever, all the camp being absorbed in receiving the coming enemy. Presently he roared again, and this time quite close by.

In an instant the camp was as still as death!

It was pitiable, to American eyes, to see the abject terror to which these stalwart Arab warriors were reduced by a single lion. The boys had read of such things in Gerard, the lion-killer's book, but had felt disposed to doubt the facts as exaggerated. But here was the evidence before their eyes. The excited, yelling crowd was hushed in a moment, and began to slink into the tents. The cattle were huddled together in the center of the *douar*, trembling with fear.

And now came a roar louder than any yet, and the dark figure of a huge lion sprung over the high thorn hedge that encircled the camp, and dashed into the midst of the frightened herd.

These last scattered in an instant, and came tearing through the tents frantic with fear, amid a pandemonium of noise, as if Bedlam had broken loose. Manuel had stepped forward, and was about to fire at the lion, when the rush came, and he had to leap out of the way to avoid being trampled to death. Bullard and Curtis had a narrow escape of the same fate, and when they were free and advanced to meet the lion, he had disappeared.

And to show his wonderful strength, he had carried with him, in his twelve-foot leap, the carcass of a full grown bullock.

The boys advanced cautiously to the place. The lion had gone, and they came to the conclusion that they would have to follow him. But as they turned to go to the gate of the *douar*, the old sheikh and a crowd of Arabs rushed to intercept them, imploring them, as they valued their lives, not to venture out. The lion, they said, was satisfied, and would molest them no more that night, but if they followed and wounded him, he would probably attack the *douar* in revenge.

When this was translated to the boys, Tom Bullard laughed contemptuously.

"And are you afraid of the lion?" asked he, of the sheikh.

"Who is not?" returned the Arab.

"I'll show you one who is not," cried Tom, in

French. "And you shall see what an American can do."

So saying, he was pressing forward to the *douar* gate, when the sheikh threw his arms around him, and held him by main strength.

"Wait till daylight!" he pleaded. "Life is the gift of Allah, and not to be thrown away like a fool. Wait only half an hour."

"But the lion will be gone," urged Bullard, in his turn.

"No fear of that," said the sheikh. "He will devour his prey in yonder thickets, and stay there till night. Allah grant that he may not come back!"

The boys were finally induced to comply with the chief's request, and remain till morning. The dogs of the *douar* were sent out after the lion, and from their loud barking it was concluded that they had found him not far off.

The three friends anxiously watched the fast-brightening east, and as soon as objects could be clearly distinguished, called for their horses.

"I'm going to teach those Arabs a lesson," declared Manuel Garcia, resolutely, as he swung into his saddle. "I don't like their conceit and their contemptuous airs, because a fellow doesn't happen to be a six-footer with a big beard. *Let's go out without any rifles, and lasso that lion.* I know the thing has been done with a grizzly, and I'll swear he's worse than any lion that ever roared."

"Agreed," cried devil-may-care Bullard, laughing gayly. "We'll astonish the natives, and show them what Americans can do."

When the Arabs saw them ready to ride out, quite unarmed, apparently, their astonishment was

"Never mind, old boy," put in Tom, to the sheikh, as he trotted by. "We'll bring the lion into camp presently, and you can kill him if you want him."

The sheikh muttered something about Frankish madmen, and the whole population of the *douar* turned out to watch the operations of the strangers.

The boys galloped briskly forward to a little thicket of bushes, near the camp, where the dogs had given tongue first. Sure enough, there lay a huge black-maned lion, calmly devouring the bullock.

As they came by, he looked up with a savage snarl, that wrinkled his lips, and exposed a lachrymal set of white teeth to view. He evidently didn't propose to be driven from his breakfast, but the boys were determined to do so, since it was impossible to cast a lasso at him so near the bushes.

Now Manuel Garcia shone out in his true colors. As cool as a cucumber was Manuel. He stooped from his saddle to pick up some pebbles, and then galloped past the lion, just outside of his spring. As he passed he threw a handful with all his force at the lion's face, and then wheeled and galloped off, laughing. The hair-brained nature of the feat excited a yell of applause from the lately scornful Arabs. Of course the lion charged; Manuel expected him to, and kept his horse just ahead of him, to draw him into the open ground. The lion pursued him for some hundred yards, when Bullard, who had been coiling his lasso meanwhile, came down like a shot across his track, whirling the noose round his head. It parted from his hand, and in another moment had settled over the lion's neck. The latter was so eager after Manuel that he did not notice it, till the pull of the galloping horse, catching him sideways as he leaped, tumbled him over and over on the grass, in ignominious defeat. Bullard had calculated his distance and his direction with the skill of an old *veguero*. A moment earlier or later, and a different direction, would have only insured his own fall.

The Arabs were so astounded that a dead silence had fallen on them.

But the lion, though stunned and choked, was full of fight. He leaped to his feet and charged Bullard. But Manuel's lasso had been swinging, even while the game was struggling in the noose. It flew through the air, settled on the lion's neck, and in a moment more the grim beast was comparatively harmless.

As fast as he dashed at one, the other would back his horse and compel him to drag him forward by main strength, and all the while the nooses were tightening steadily. The Arabs were dumb with amazement. They saw their old enemy powerless, without having received a shot. He struggled and dragged, dragging the horses here and there with comparative ease, but the riders were old hands with the lasso, and knew how to manage him.

His roars grew fainter and more strangled, and his struggles less violent. Finally they ceased entirely, his tongue hanging out of his mouth; and the desert king had died of strangulation.

The Arabs could not believe their eyes at first, but when they realized the truth, their joy knew no bounds. They crowded around Manuel and Bullard to kiss the hem of their garments. Nothing was too good for the lately despised Franks, now the latter had shown such indisputable courage. The Arabs were shamed before their own women. So highly do they value courage, that they made offers of marriage to all three of the boys that night; offers of the most beautiful maidens of the tribe, if they would only take them.

The friends feasted gayly for three days among the Ouled Cassim, in all honor and respect, and then departed for their next neighbors, the Ouled Ibrahim, preceded by their fame gained in lassoing a lion.

CHAPTER IV.

UP THE NILE.

In the porch of Shepherd's Hotel, at Cairo, a few months later, sat our three friends, bronzed and

hardy-looking, after their Algerian campaign against the lions.

They had been successful beyond their hopes in hunting, and had acquired a stock of Arabic which enabled them to converse with the natives on most ordinary subjects without turning to their interpreter every moment. More than this, they had learned much of Arab character, and knew how to deal with chiefs, and in hunting the fierce Algerine lions had realized what it was to have their lives depending on the accuracy of their aim and firmness of their nerves.

After about two months spent among the Algerine Arabs, and after killing four lions, they began to think it was time that they were proceeding on their journey toward the unknown regions of Central Africa. Accordingly they returned to Algiers, took ship for Malta, and from thence by the English peninsular and Oriental steamship, to Alexandria, and by railroad to Cairo.

Now they sat on the porch of Shepherd's Hotel, watching the crowds of donkey-boys squabbling with each other over who should mount an English traveler for a ride through the city. In Cairo there are no carriages. Every one rides, and almost every one rides a donkey.

These Egyptian donkeys are little creatures, not much larger than a very big dog, but their strength and spirit are amazing. Small as they are, each will carry a man six feet high on his back, and gallop all day at that.

Manuel and Jack were both questioning Tom, who had just dismounted from one of these very donkeys, from a visit to the river, where he had been to examine the large boat in which they proposed to ascend the Nile, and which was called a *dahabiah*.

"Well, Tom, how does she go now?" asked Curtis.

"All right," responded Tom. "Not a rat since she's raised, and Mohammed's used up ten pounds of sulphur for the bedbugs. I guess she'll do for three Yanks now."

This sounds curious to you, no doubt; but the reader will understand that in the hot climate of Egypt, vermin of all sorts, insect and quadruped, increase with wonderful rapidity. Consequently, travelers who hire boats to go up the Nile, always, if they are wise, fumigate their boat to expel the insects, then sink it to drown out the rats, and finally paint it up again before they ascend the river to Nubia.

Tom, since his arrival in Cairo, had been the business-man of the party, and now came to announce to them that their boat was ready to start.

A few minutes later, the three travelers were galloping down to Boulak, the port of Cairo, to embark on their long and uncertain voyage.

There was the *dahabiah*, a long, sharp boat, a hundred feet in length, with a large raised cabin in the stern, and a tall lateen sail, hanging from a yard at least seventy feet long, and flapping in the wind.

"Three cheers for the American eagle, and ho for Africa!" shouted Tom, gayly, as the *dahabiah* swept from her moorings and pointed her prow southward.

The three boy sportsmen left Cairo in the fall and traveled up the Nile in their *dahabiah* until they reached Nubia. Many were the curious and wonderful things which they saw on the route, the pyramids, which were built four thousand years ago; the ruins of Egyptian temples, made of stones, each one as big as a small house; and the great sandy desert, where the Arabs roam about on camels, and where you have to travel for a week before you see a drop of water or a blade of grass. But, they were all anxiety to reach the upper Nile, where they were to find the hunting they sought, and where they also heard for the first time, of the wonderful people called the Sword Hunters.

The Egyptians told them that these men, who are a tribe of Arabs called *Hamans*, went out hunting lions and elephants with nothing but a sword, for they had no guns, nor bows and arrows.

The young sportsmen were very anxious to see these men, and still more to see the game they hunted. But in order to be comfortable among the wild people they were going to see, it was first necessary to learn the language better than they had. So the adventurers bought grammars and dictionaries of Arabic from the bazar at Cairo, and took a teacher with them, who did all their business with the natives, and who was called a *Dragoman*, which means interpreter. This *Dragoman* was named Mohammed; and a very splendid looking fellow he was, dressed up in velvet clothes, with great trowsers three times as big as those of the ganchos they had seen at Buenos Ayres, and wearing a big turban on his head, with four or five pistols and daggers in his girdle. This Mohammed proved a very useful man to them, and they began to pick up the Arabic very rapidly.

In about two months from the time they left Cairo they had got as far as their boat would take them, to a little town called Khartoum, where the Blue and White Nile meet.

The governor of Khartoum was very polite to them, for they carried a letter from the pasha of Egypt, which the American consul had obtained for them. There they procured horses and camels, and then set forth up the valley of the Blue Nile, into the country of the great game, in the south of Abyssinia.

The Blue Nile is a very curious river, for it is almost dry half the year, and then, all of a sudden, in the spring, a great flood comes rushing down from the mountains, fills it up, and makes the river Nile rise, all the way down to Alexandria. But this great freshet does no harm, as it would on our Mississippi.

On the contrary, the Egyptians consider it a great blessing, for it brings down a quantity of rich black mud, which settles all over the fields of Egypt, and

makes corn, rice, cotton and sugar grow luxuriously, without any more manure, causing Egypt to be called the "Garden of the World."

But when our travelers went up it, after the long dry summer of Africa, the river was shrunk into a dry channel, between high yellow banks, and the only trace of water was a succession of pools at different intervals, where the channel had worn deep holes, and had kept the water; but, even these pools were slowly drying up.

But the further they were from Khartoum the more water there was. As the country rose, and they got nearer the mountains, there were more trees and grass, and here and there the pools were nearly a mile long. At last Mohammed informed them that the next day they would be in the elephant country, and near to the tents of the Hamrau Arabs.

So they pitched their camp for the night in the dry bed of the river, close to the edge of a great pool, and got all their guns ready for the expected hunting.

Thus far they had seen hardly any game, for the country was so dry that it had all moved up toward the mountains; but that night brought them, for the first time, into the presence of all sorts of wild animals.

The pool by which they had encamped was one of the largest they had yet seen, over a mile in length, and quite deep. On the banks above was a grove of big trees on one side, and a sloping green plain on the other. The moon was just at the full, and rose as the sun set.

The camp of our boy travelers was very prettily pitched. There was a beautiful large tent, striped white and blue, where the three friends had their beds; and around the tent pole hung their guns and pistols. Behind this tent, and on each side, were a number of others, filled with servants, guards, camel-drivers, grooms, and so on. You can hire Egyptians and Arabs for a dollar a month in Africa, though it takes three of them to do the work of one white man in our country, for they're as lazy as they are cheap. All the baggage and tents have to be carried on camels there, and every camel needs a driver, so that there were fifty or sixty people in the party to take care of three young adventurers; and half of them were useless.

CHAPTER V.

THE RIVER HORSE AND THE SWORD HUNTERS.

TOM BULLARD sat in front of the tent on a camp-chair looking at his new rifle. Tom was very proud of that rifle. It was the last new pattern of breech-loader, and carried a bullet with a steel point. It could be fired twelve or fourteen times in a minute without any trouble. Tom had been practicing ever since he had been in Egypt, and felt very eager to try his hand on live game, for he could drive a nail into a tree, with a bullet, every time, at fifty paces, and could hit the bull's-eye as far as he could see it.

Curtis and Manuel both had practiced, and were good shots, though not as good as Bullard. They were near Tom to-night, in front of a small fire before the tent door.

"Say, fellows," said the Westerner, suddenly, "I guess there's hippopotamuses in this pool here. I'm a-going to shoot one if there is."

"But you forget that if there are any, our fire will scare them away," suggested Manuel. "You might watch all night from here and not see one."

"Not from here," assented Tom. "Any fellow knows that. I'm going to steal round to the other side of the pool, and lay for 'em. Hark! what's that but one, now?"

The boys listened, and heard a loud snorting and blowing some way off, in the pool. They could see something flash in the moonlight in a cloud of white foam, and then disappear. In a moment more there was more snorting and blowing, and several more of the shining objects appeared.

Tom started up, gun in hand.

"There you are!" he cried. "That's them at last, and I'm a-going for 'em! Good-night, fellows. See you again when I've shot one of them critters."

And Tom stalked away, bent on slaughter, for he'd shot nothing but a few wild geese so far, and was hungry for hippopotami.

Curtis fidgeted a little while.

"Guess I'll go, too, Manuel," he at length decided. "Will you come along?"

"Not to-night," returned Manuel. "One of us ought to be in camp, for they say that there are plenty of wild fellows in this country, prowling round to see what they can steal. I shall do my hunting in the daytime. But you go, Jack, if you wish, while I set the guard for to-night."

So Jack took his gun, and started after Bullard, whom he soon overtook, and the two proceeded quietly along the shore of the pool, under the shade of the trees, watching the water.

Every now and then they heard the great beasts blow, and saw the huge heads, each as big as a molasse barrel, rise out of the water, and then sink again.

"They'll come out to feed soon," whispered Jack, who had been studying up the habits of the hippopotamus in his books lately. So the boy hunters crept on quietly, waiting for a sure shot. The hippopotami were away at the other end of the pool, for they are very shy beasts, and the fire frightened them. Presently Jack saw one of them come up and blow, close to shore, and he and Bullard ran silently on, expecting to head it off.

And, sure enough, when they got opposite to the place where they had seen it, the hippopotamus came up again, still closer, swam swiftly on, and presently reared his ungainly form up in the shallow water. Then, for the first time, they saw what kind

of a creature it was, and Tom and Jack couldn't help laughing at the sight.

Fancy a fat pig, about as big as a small elephant, with a head nearly as long as its body, a broad flat snout instead of a pointed one, and you have a hippopotamus, or river horse.

This one had not yet seen the boys, who were hidden by the shade of the trees. He paddled out of the water, looked around once or twice, and opened a mouth about the size of a common door, lined with a row of white tusks that looked big enough to crunch up a bar of iron. Tom and Jack didn't much like his looks, but since they were in for it, they determined to have a shot.

"It's an old bull, Tom," whispered Jack. "Look at his tusks. Which shall take the first shot?"

"I will," answered Bullard, quietly. "Here goes."

And the Western boy stepped out of his cover and walked straight up to the old bull.

In the daytime the old fellow would have gone back into the water, but he was hungry now. It is the habit of the hippopotamus to come out at night, and feed on wild rice and other vegetables that grow near the water; and when he is hungry he is quite bold. Instead of plunging back into the water, the great beast gave a bellow, snapped his white tusks together, and charged straight at Bullard with gaping jaws.

Tom was as cool as a veteran. He waited till the old fellow was close to him, when he fired right into the vast cavernous mouth, and then turned and ran.

The hippopotamus stopped and staggered. He shook his great head from side to side, gave a snort and a bellow, and then went for the enemy. It was perfectly amazing to see how fast he went. The clumsy, fat beast ran like a fast trotting horse, and gained on Tom at every step. The boy jammed in a fresh cartridge as he went, and called to Curtis.

"Up the bank like a streak, Jack!"

But Curtis was not the fellow to run and leave his friend. He waited under a big tree till Bullard had passed him, and the hippopotamus was thundering by, within ten feet, not seeing the second enemy. Jack took a hurried aim in the uncertain light, and fired at the tremendous head between the eye and ear.

To his astonishment and delight down fell the old bull in an instant, and Jack shouted:

"Hurrah, Tom! I've fixed him! Shot the first hippopotamus! Hurrah!"

And so he had, plumb through the brain, and the great beast was dead. Bullard came running back, wild with pleasure, and not at all jealous.

He and Jack pulled out their tapes and measured the old fellow. His mouth alone was six feet across, when it was open; and from snout to tail he was eighteen feet long.

Jack cut off his tail for a trophy, and they were thinking of going back to camp, when they were startled by the sound of horses' feet, on the bank above.

Now, in these wild countries, you have to be on your guard all the time, for every man you meet may be an enemy. Jack and Tom knew this, and each instinctively cocked his rifle, and moved behind the huge carcass of the hippopotamus, as four men on horseback rode down the bank and halted in the shadow.

Jack called out in Arabic, which he could already speak a little:

"Who are you? Take care! We are Americans, and armed! Who are you?"

A voice came out of the darkness, replying:

"Hunters of the Beni Hamrau. Peace be unto you, if you are friends."

Jack threw his rifle into the hollow of his arm.

"They're the famous Sword Hunters, Tom," he said. "Let's invite them to our camp. Manuel will be tickled to death to see them."

He then turned to the strangers, and spoke in his best Arabic, inviting them to come to the camp and have some supper.

"We thank you very much," replied the same grave voice. "We will come. We heard from our tribe that you were in the country, and we have come to see your wonderful guns. We heard your shots just now. Come, brothers, let us salute the strangers."

And then the horsemen advanced into the moonlight, and the boys saw them for the first time. They were mounted on stout, compact little horses, much like the pampas horses. The men could hardly be seen, for they were muffled up in long white blankets called *hykes*, and looked like four old women, so far. They had neither gun nor lance, like the other Arabs the boys had seen. Each of them had the hilt of a straight, cross-handed sword sticking up at the saddle-bow, and his left leg pressed it against the side of the horse, and kept it from swinging about.

The one that seemed to be the chief came forward and shook hands with Curtis, saying again:

"Peace be unto you, brother. I am Abou Hassan, and these are my brothers, Hamet, Abdallah, and Selim. You have done well to kill this great creature with that gun. It takes us all day to kill one."

Bullard shook hands with the Arabs all round, and Curtis told them their names, which the Arabs repeated very gravely, but got dreadfully mixed up.

Then the little party proceeded to camp, where they found Manuel waiting supper for them, and the Arabs were much pleased with everything. Here they threw off their long cloaks, and appeared almost entirely naked, except for a little pair of breeches, like bathing breeches, and a strong belt round the waist. They turned their horses loose to graze and every man took down the sword from his

saddle-bow and nursed it, as if it was a baby he was proud of.

Now that the boys could see them clearly they proved noble-looking fellows, active and graceful as cats and very handsome. They wore their hair very long, and elaborately oiled and curled. It was carefully kept out of their eyes by a leather band round the forehead, and came down their backs, almost to the ground, when they sat down. Abou Hassan had a splendid black beard, but the rest were young men, whose beards were just beginning to start, in fact boys, of the same ages as our three friends.

Manuel was very much interested with them at supper. These wild Arabs behaved with as much politeness as if they had been princes, and did not commit a single rude act. They never interrupted any one speaking, and if they were asked a question, always answered politely. Manuel was the best Arabic scholar of the party, being the oldest, and the dragoman was always by to help them, if there was a word they did not understand.

Abou Hassan turned out to be one of the crack hunters of the Hamrau tribe, and, with his young brothers, was just about starting on a trip. Hearing that the white party was in the country, he had come to offer them his services, to hunt, and to find game for them.

"But how do you go out hunting?" asked Manuel.

"What kind of game do you hunt?"

"Everything," said the Arab, gravely, "from an elephant to an antelope."

"And what do you kill a lion with?" asked Tom, whose mind was bent on killing one of the royal beasts.

Abou Hassan smiled, and patted the sword in his arms.

"With this," he said, quietly. "We four do not fear the best lion in the country, if we catch him in the open fields, but we can do nothing in the forest."

"And what do you kill an elephant with?" asked Manuel.

"With this," replied Abou Hassan, again pattering the sword affectionately.

"What, kill an elephant with a sword? Why, how many of you get at him?"

"We four," responded Abou Hassan, shrugging his shoulders. "Sometimes we do it with only two, but four are safest. More are only in the way of each other."

"Do you know where we can find any elephants?" asked Jack Curtis.

"We have marked a herd about three hours' ride from here," replied the Sword Hunter. "If my white brothers will go to-morrow, they shall see how the sons of Hamrau hunt the elephant."

The boys were delighted with this news. They soon made arrangements with the four Arabs, by which the latter were to find them all the game they wanted, stay with them as long as they were in the country, and hunt for them, and were to receive for their services half of the game, the tusks of all elephants killed, except what fell by the white hunters' rifles, and a horse apiece at the end of their term of services.

And the next morning they agreed to show the boys a herd of wild elephants.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HERD.

LONG before sunrise, next morning, Manuel was awakened by a touch on his shoulder. Looking up, he beheld the grave, handsome face of Abou Hassan. The Arab held his sword hugged to his breast as usual, and had his finger on his lips.

"Make no noise, white brother," he said, in a low tone. "Elephants are near us, come to drink at the pool. Time to be off before they get to the forest."

Manuel jumped up and shook himself. In those wild countries people always sleep in their clothes, so he was ready in a minute. He picked up his rifle and cartridge-box and sallied out. Abou Hassan was gone, and when the boys came out they heard him rousing the grooms, and bidding them get their masters' horses ready. They found the three young Sword Hunters standing silently by the heads of their horses, and watching the pool.

It was nearly dark. The full moon was already half-set, and the sun was still behind the distant hills. Only the stars looked twinkling down overhead.

At the end of the pool, in the side toward the open country, they could hear a distant splashing, different from the hippopotamus, as if some large animals were bathing in the water. The experienced Sword Hunters knew that the noise proceeded from elephants, and said so. Presently Abou Hassan came back, with the grooms, leading the horses of our young hunters. They were all handsome horses, small and compact, of the country breed, coming from the Arab.

Abou Hassan gave a silent signal, and they all mounted and rode away round the back of the camp, at a slow pace. The Arabs had left their long *hukas* behind, and rode nearly naked, with their swords ready under the left leg. To keep them from slipping and swinging, they were hung to the saddle-bow by a little strap, and two stiff pieces of leather were sewed on the scabbards, sticking out, one above, and the other below, the rider's leg.

In this way they rode off. The boys could hardly believe it possible that these men were going out to hunt a herd of elephants, with nothing but a little sword. Jack Curtis thought of his own experience with a sword in the fight with the Indians, and muttered to Bullard:

"Those fellows can't do anything, Tom. We shall have to shoot the elephants."

"Let's wait and see. Maybe they know more

than we think they do. If not, we'll show them," was Tom's reply.

"Hush!" whispered Manuel. "Trust to them. They know more than we do about their game."

Abou Hassan turned and made a gesture for silence, and the party rode out of the river bed up the further bank. They chose a place where a little stream entered the river, now dried up, leaving a steep channel to the rising country. On this side of the river there was no cover, for some miles, and the elephants would have to cross an open plain, before they reached any wood.

While they were in the torrent bed, the hunters were protected from view of their game, and by great good luck the wind was blowing from the elephants toward them. If it had not been, they would have been compelled to go many miles round, for an elephant can scent a human being many miles off, if he be to windward.

As they went slowly on, they could hear the elephants still splashing in the water, and when they had gone about a mile, the sky began to flush with a bright crimson glow. Presently the sun rose, and they could see that they were not far from the head of the torrent bed.

But Abou Hassan did not go that far. As soon as the sun rose, he turned his horse to the left, and climbed the bank, calling to the others to follow him. They did so, and in a moment more beheld the object of all their hopes plainly before them.

A smooth slope stretched down to the river, covered with long grass, dried up by the fierce summer heats. Coming up the slope from the pool, lazily swinging their trunks to and fro, was a herd of some twenty elephants, led by an old bull, with tusks as white as snow, and of enormous size. There were two other bulls, with tusks nearly as large, a number of female elephants with shorter ones, and five or six little baby elephants, without any, but trotting along by their mothers' sides, playing, with clumsy antics.

The elephants saw the hunters just about as soon as they saw the elephants, and the whole herd fell into confusion at once. The female elephants threw up their trunks with a shrill trumpeting, and ran back to the pools, with their little ones, while the three bulls, led by the stately old patriarch of the herd, stalked solemnly toward the strangers, as if to cover the retreat.

"Come on, boys!" shouted Bullard. "Now's your time for tusks. Let's show the niggers how to hunt."

And he was dashing forward, when Manuel restrained him.

"Don't go, Tom," he protested. "Let the Arabs go to work. I want to see what they'll do."

And he repeated his wish in Arabic to Abou Hassan.

"My white brother shall see," said the Arab, gravely. "The elephants are coming to charge us, but there are too many for the sword. Let my brothers come forward with us slowly, and fire at the two little bulls. They will run away, but the old one will charge fiercely. Then let my brothers stand side by side, and leave us to deal with him."

"That's fair," said Curtis. "We can't expect four men, with nothing but swords, to attack three elephants together."

"Let's go forward, then," said Manuel. "When you fire, aim at the beasts' foreheads. Perhaps we shall kill them both."

The seven horsemen accordingly walked their horses leisurely down toward the elephants, which, on their part, began to quicken their pace, threw up their trunks, and roar fiercely.

Abou Hassan remarked that they had never been hunted before, or they would not be so fierce; and he was right. No white men or guns had ever been there before, in all probability, and the Hamraus seldom attack herds. They prefer solitary elephants, old bulls with wicked tempers, which have left the herd in disgust. Such bulls are called in India "rogue elephants," and the Hamraus know that they have the largest tusks, which will sell for most money, which is what they hunt elephants for. A good pair of tusks will be worth a hundred and fifty dollars, which will buy a good horse and a gun and many other things in Africa. So the Hamraus, who have nothing but swords, wisely pick out single elephants whenever they can find them, although such always fight very hard.

Now, as the boys went forward, they noticed the difference in the character of the elephants. The nearer they came the fiercer the old fellow grew, while the young ones began to drop behind and show signs of backing out. The rest of the herd was in full flight up the river, when Abou Hassan cried:

"Now, white brothers, drive off the children, and we will kill the father."

The boys drew up and took deliberate aim. Bullard took the left-hand elephant, and sent a ball right into the place he aimed, the center of its forehead. But the ball never dropped. On the contrary, he uttered a shrill scream, wheeled round, and made off, full speed after the herd, as if he was only frightened.

Manuel and Jack hit the other young bull, one in the top of the forehead, the other in the trunk. The first bullet glanced off, and the second brought a stream of blood. As Abou Hassan had predicted, away went the young fellow after his brother, in full flight.

"Look out, fellows! Here comes the old man himself!" cried Tom, hastily cramming in a fresh cartridge.

"Keep back, white brothers!" shouted Abou Hassan. "Our turn now."

And at the same minute the old elephant, with a furious roar, came tearing up the slope to attack them, while all four of the Arab Sword Hunters

dashed in their spurs and went off to meet him, as swift as so many birds on the wing, their horses seeming to enjoy the fun, and the riders yelling wildly.

As they neared the elephant, out flashed their swords, and they all scattered around the beast, and attacked him fiercely.

CHAPTER VII.

KILLING AN ELEPHANT WITH A SWORD.

It was a splendid sight to see Abou Hassan and his brothers attacking the old bull with no weapon but their swords, and seemed to the boys perfect madness. But, when they saw the way the sword hunters went to work, they altered their opinion.

As the Arabs came near the elephant, the whole four scattered, on either side, so as to puzzle the creature which to attack. Abou Hassan swept past on the right, two of his brothers on the left, while the youngest, Selim, who was a slim boy of light weight, went almost up to the animal's nose before he turned. When he did turn he was not twenty feet from the old bull. This seemed to decide the elephant, who had stopped, and was pawing the earth, and trumpeting fiercely, with uplifted trunk. The old fellow gave a scream of rage, and "went" for Selim like a mad creature. Away galloped the boy, before the elephant, with the beast's trunk hanging almost over the horse's tail, but in a very few jumps the rider began to gain upon him.

Then Jack Curtis uttered an exclamation of wonder, for Selim actually began to pull at his horse, and let the elephant catch up, so that it seemed every moment as if the boy must be captured, as he looked back over his shoulder, and shouted at the elephant, exciting the beast to tenfold fury.

But, while Selim was leading on the old bull in the delusive chase, the rest of the Hamraus were not idle. As soon as they were past the elephant, they all turned round like lightning, and came tearing up behind at full speed. Abou Hassan was the first, close to the bull's hind-leg. Then the active chief suddenly leaped out of his saddle, going at full speed as he was, ran three or four steps on the ground, with his sword uplifted in both hands, and made a tremendous blow at the elephant's hind-leg, just above the heel.

The boys could see the whole operation perfectly, for Selim was leading the old bull in their front. They saw a great red gash, two feet long, appear in the huge hind-leg, and heard a loud crack as the back sinews parted. At the same instant the elephant stopped as if it had been shot, and remained standing, utterly unable to move. Selim pulled up and all the hunters gave a shout together. The elephant's foot was turned up in front just like an old shoe, and the beast was disabled.

There it stood, roaring, and lashing its trunk to and fro, holding up the wounded leg, and standing on the other three.

Then young Selim walked his horse back toward the bull, and stooped from his saddle to the ground, whence he picked up some dirt and threw it at the elephant. This insult enraged the old fellow so much that he tried to put down his foot and hop forward on three legs, to punish the saucy boy.

But that was just what the Arabs wanted. Abou Hassan was watching his opportunity, and, just as the elephant strained to reach Selim, he ran forward and gave a mighty blow at the un wounded leg, opening a second awful gash, from whence the red blood spurted out all over the Arab.

That finished the poor old bull. As the second sinew parted, with a loud crack, he fell on his knees, and remained there, with the blood pouring from the hind-legs like the stream from a pump.

Abou Hassan stooped down and plucked some dry grass, with which he carefully wiped his sword clean before he did anything. Then he took the long leather scabbard from his saddle-bow and fixed it on the edge of the sword, as if the blade had been a razor. The boys could see him strapping the weapon on with great care, feeling the edge with his fingers, and going at it again as if he never would have it sharp enough.

They rode down to see him nearer, and as they did so the old bull tottered to and fro a moment, and came crashing down on his side, dead. Abou Hassan had cut the arteries of both hind-legs, and the elephant had bled to death from the wounds.

The boys were wonderfully pleased with their friends, the sword hunters. Jack Curtis, especially, who was fond of the sword, and anxious to know how to use it, was delighted with the battle. He came to Abou Hassan and begged for permission to see the blade which could make such cuts. The Arab showed it to him very politely, and told him to feel the edge. Jack did so, and found that it was really and truly as sharp as a razor, for he could cut a single hair in two by just striking it over the edge of the sword.

"And do you make these weapons yourselves?" asked Jack, when he had admired the keen edge.

"No," Abou Hassan said. "We get them from the traders, who bring them over the sea. My father bought this when he was a boy."

Jack looked at the weapon again very closely. He thought it must be one of the famous D. n. e. blades he had read of. But no. They were all curved he remembered, like a sickle. This was a long straight sword, that came as high as his breast, with a simple cross hilt of iron, and on the blade a stamped, in German text, "Ad m Schmidt, Solingen."

Then Jack remembered that he had often heard of these Solingen swords as being of such good steel that you could cut a cast-iron stove with one without hurting the edge, and also remembered that he had one himself, with a very handsome steel scabbard.

But then he knew that that was no sharper than a common table-knife, in fact not quite so sharp. So he resolved to have it ground the first opportunity.

"How do you get them so sharp?" he asked Abou Hassan, while the others, with their swords, were cutting out the long white tusks of the elephant. "Have you any grind-stones?"

"We sharpen them first on a wet stone," answered the Arab. "It takes a week to sharpen a good sword, for the steel is very hard, and one must do it slowly. Afterward we keep it strapped, three or four times a day."

Jack was recalled from his talk by Bullard, who cried:

"Come, Jack, come. The rest of those elephants are getting away. Let's go after them."

Then Jack turned and saw that it was true. The rest of the elephants were over a mile off, now, up the river, on their way to a forest at some distance. The horses were still fresh; Abou Hassan thought they could catch up; so away they went, leaving the dead elephant behind them.

The race was full of excitement, for the elephants had a long start, and were making for the cover at good speed. Manuel's horse was the swiftest of the party, and the way was down a gentle slope, so that he went at a tremendous rate of speed, leading the crowd by several lengths, and gaining.

Young Selim was second, Tom and Jack neck and neck for the third place, and Abou Hassan, with his two other brothers, was the last. They came up with the herd, hand over hand, as the elephants were going up a steep bank at the other side of the river, having crossed between two of the river pools when the hunters came down the other slope. Over the bank was a small belt of open country and then some young forest.

When the elephants had scrambled to the top of the bank the boys were down to the other side of the river. And now the chase grew very close.

Down the first bank clattered the horsemen, across the dry bed of the river, and up the bank on the opposite side, which they topped while the herd was yet in the midst of the open. Here Curtis, by a liberal use of his spurs, managed to shoot to the front, for Jack was an accomplished rider by this time. He had had practice enough to make him one. Tom followed him, and they both came up on the right of the herd, nearly together, at the very edge of the forest.

There was no more fight in the elephants. They were in full flight.

Jack Curtis threw up his rifle as he galloped by within ten feet of the bull he and Manuel had hit before. He had loaded his rifle with an explosive copper shell, aimed behind the shoulder and fired.

Crack! went the gun, and the bullet went *thump* into the elephant, which stopped, staggered, fell on its knees, struggled up again, and finally stumbled slowly off after the rest. Jack stuck to his game, and put in a fresh cartridge. As he did so, Hamet, the oldest of Abou Hassan's brothers, came tearing by, and leaped off his horse behind the bull.

Flash! went his sword, as the Arab made a furious cut, and the elephant was brought to a standstill at once. But the rifle-shell had already done his business, although the immense strength of the beast had enabled him to get up and stagger on. As they looked the bull shook all over, and fell crashing down, dead; and Jack had again triumphed, in killing the *first elephant of the party*, outside of the Arabs.

He looked round and a very exciting scene was taking place. Bullard was firing into the other bull; and every time he put in a shot the elephant turned on him and charged. Tom put spurs to his horse and galloped away, till the elephant got tired and gave up the chase. The instant it did so, Tom turned back, galloped alongside, and put in another bullet, behind the shoulder, which brought another charge, for Tom's bullets were too small to kill an elephant, and he had not thought of using shells, which Curtis had found so useful. But Bullard stuck to his game like a leech, firing away at short range, till the poor creature stopped at last, exhausted from loss of blood.

Meanwhile, the rest were not idle by any means. Manuel Garcia was the coolest of the three boys, although he was not such a good shot as the Westerner. He watched his chance, galloped up into the herd, and sent a steel-pointed bullet into one of the female elephants heads, between the eye and ear, in the temple. It was an experiment, to see if he could kill an African elephant with a head shot, and it succeeded. The game went down all in a heap, and Manuel had triumphed, too.

But the Arabs had done best of all. A flying herd, well scared, was the very thing for them. Abou Hassan had stopped three elephants, and each of his brothers one apiece, before they got into the forest, where the swordsmen could not get at them. Then the party pulled up, very well satisfied. Ten of the herd had been bagged altogether, including the first bull killed by the sword hunters; and now Abou Hassan and his brothers rode back, and finished off the elephants they had before only stopped, for the deep sword-cuts had crippled them so completely, that they could not stir a foot from where they were left. But a second cut soon bled them to death.

And now came the question what should be done with all these huge carcasses? If they were left alone they would putrefy before the next day, and the country would be unbearable.

When Manuel asked Abou Hassan the question, the Arab smiled.

"Cut out the tusks," he said. "The meat will find eaters before night."

And Abou Hassan was correct.

For the first time they had hardly seen

before noon there came straggling in from all round the country, hundreds of people, Arabs, Gallas, Abyssinians and others, most of them half-starved, who flocked round the carcasses like ants.

They were all nearly naked, and carried short spears, with very broad heads, shaped like a laurel leaf, and sharp as razors. They flocked to the huge carcasses, howling like wolves, coming in crowds from their distant villages, hid away in the mountains and woods. These people had probably been watching our hunters all the time, and expecting their first full meal for months, for an elephant's hide is too thick to be pierced by their puny bows and arrows. They dashed at the dead beasts, and in a very few minutes were cutting away the meat in great slabs, fighting and screaming among each other, covered with blood from head to foot. They actually jumped inside of the carcasses and rooted out the entrails like wolves, presenting a sight disgusting enough to the white hunters.

"Those are not *your* people, are they?" remarked Manuel to Abou Hassan.

The Arab smiled disdainfully.

"No," he said. "Those are the miserable mountain tribes, that crawl on foot, and have no swords. *My* people are the kings of the land. You shall see them some day. These are but the dogs of Base."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LIONS.

DURING the rest of the day the hunters remained in camp, and reposed their tired horses. Their people brought in the tusks of the elephant, and such choice pieces of the meat as Abou Hassan assured them were good. It was amusing to see the way in which the hungry savages scattered, when the stately Hamrau swordsmen approached the carcass to cut out what they needed. The Arabs paid no more attention to them than if they had been hyenas, and the negroes waited around respectfully till the brave hunters were served.

Only one man tried to be impudent. It was a very large, powerful negro, at work at the big bull. He kept on cutting when young Selim came near, seemingly trusting to the latter being a boy for protection. Selim came near where the big fellow was hacking away at one of the tusks, which had been left half cut out. The young Hamrau ordered him away as if he had been his servant, and the big fellow laughed in a sneering manner, and told him to "make him go if he could."

Manuel Garcia was coming up, gun in hand, to look at the tusks, which he had offered to buy of the Hamraus. Selim had his sword on his shoulder, and Manuel heard him say, quietly:

"Go, dog of a Galla, or I will leave you there in two pieces."

The big negro started up, spear in hand, shouting angrily:

"Try it then, little fellow, and see what will happen to you."

Young Selim said not another word, but he ran to the negro. As he came, the big man sent his spear at him, and turned to run. But Selim, with wonderful dexterity, parried the flying weapon with his sword, bounded after his enemy, and overtook him in two or three steps. He made but one blow with his razor-like sword, and cut the negro right in half at the waist, so that the unhappy creature never spoke again. Then the boy calmly stooped and wiped his sword, and shook his hand at the frightened crowd beyond, as much as to say:

"Look out I don't serve you the same way."

Manuel was shocked, but he could not help admiring the boldness and skill of the boy, and the Arabs took off the tusks of the elephant in silence, undisturbed by any of the other crowd.

By sunset, all that remained of the ten elephants was their bones; and crowds of men, women and children were trooping off to the hills, with huge loads of meat on their shoulders.

While our travelers were resting in camp, they learned a good deal about the game from the Hamraus. Abou Hassan told them there were elephants, rhinoceroses, and plenty of giraffes and antelopes, a little further up the river; and promised to show them a lake, where they should have all the sport they wanted.

Accordingly, during the day, they got their guns in order, and made ready for their trip; and, as soon as the sun rose next morning they were on their way to the lake. They made an easy journey of some fifteen miles through a country that grew greener at every step, and at sunset they went into camp at the borders of a beautiful lake surrounded by hills. Their camp was in a very pretty little wood, and the country was sprinkled over with copse of low, scrubby thorns, in the midst of real green grass, the first they had seen since leaving Europe, for everything in the country was burned up by the sun.

They could see that Abou Hassan was right. Herds of antelopes were feeding about in full view, like cattle, and the long necks of a number of giraffes were visible, here and there. Rhinoceroses were scattered about, in pairs, and a few had calves with them.

Manuel took a telescope, and climbed up a tree, while the rest were pitching camp. He watched the game with great interest, and counted four different kinds of rhinoceros in sight. Two of them were white and very large. They were shaped just like huge pigs, but as tall as a horse. One kind had a single horn on its snout, the other had two, the front one being about four feet long. The two other kinds were black, and differed in the same way, having one horn or two.

The rhinoceroses seemed to be stupid, lazy beasts, lying down a good deal; but suddenly one of them

to grow crazy. It was a two-horned black

fellow, feeding quietly. Manuel saw a large antelope, with horns shaped just like corkscrews, pass near this stupid-looking beast. What he did, Manuel could not see, but the rhinoceros took offense at him, and made a vicious charge at the antelope, which ran away, bounding over a low bush like a bird. When the rhinoceros found the antelope was gone, the beast seemed to think the bush had insulted him, for he rushed at it furiously, rooted it up with his long horn, and sent it flying in the air, when he caught it again, and did not rest till he had pounded it bits.

Manuel laughed heartily and asked Abou Hassan to explain the scene when he was in camp that night.

"The rhinoceros is a fool," replied the Arab. "He is subject to fits of fury about nothing at all, and is very dangerous to hunt, for he can run nearly as fast as a horse, and goes on three legs as well as four. We always have to cut him on both sides before we can get him safe."

The travelers made their camp secure that night, for Abou Hassan told them there were many lions about, that would steal their horses. So they made a stiff fence of thorn bushes, and lighted big fires, behind which they were secure, for the lion will not face fire as a general rule, at least not in that part of Africa. As we have seen, the lions of Algeria are very different beasts. They seem to fear nothing.

That night the travelers could hear the roar of lions all round them, and several of the beasts came close to the fence. Tom Bullard wanted to go out and have a shot, but the Arabs persuaded him not to go.

"My white brother will only get killed for nothing," said Abou Hassan, "God made the night for the lion and the day for man. Leave the lion his kingdom. In the morning we will show you how we kill them."

So Tom was forced to remain quiet, and the lions had it all their own way outside. One of them pulled down some animal at the water side, for the boys heard a great splashing and roaring, and afterward all the beasts began to growl and fight over the carcass, whatever it was, till it grew light, just before sunrise.

Then Abou Hassan said that it was a good time to go out, for the carcass would keep the lions by the water, and sure enough it turned out as he said. The moon had not yet gone down, and the light in the east was increasing every moment, when the boys rode out of camp to find the lions. There they were, five altogether, three lions, a lioness, and a half-grown cub, finishing their meal on the carcass of a young giraffe, which they had dragged up from the water's edge.

The Hamraus galloped out to get between them and the cover, and then the lions didn't seem to know what to do, for they are cowardly beasts in daylight. They growled and grumbled a good deal, but that didn't scare the Hamraus. They stood firm till the sun rose, and then the fight began in real earnest.

Tom Bullard had profited by his experience of the day before, and had a supply of rifle shells, as well as bullets, for Jack's success had told him what terrible things they were, bursting inside and tearing the most ferocious creature to pieces. But he was too proud of his shooting to use those on anything short of an elephant, and he was the first to try a shot at the lions, while they still stood undecided.

Turning his horse round to take a good aim, he leveled his rifle at the head of the lioness, and fired. The animal was looking at Abou Hassan at the time, and offered a fair temple shot.

"Plug!" uttered a shout of triumph, for the lions dropped, and Abou Hassan cried out:

"Well done, white brother!"

The moment the shot was fired the three lions and the cub turned, and charged Manuel Garcia, who was on the opposite side from the Hamraus, bounding forward in a cloud of dust. Manuel and Jack fired together, and were answered by loud roars. The next moment Manuel's horse was knocked down by one of the lions, Manuel himself leaping off as it fell, a trick in which he had become expert among the gauchos of South America.

The young Spaniard had a double-barreled breech-loader, and with the desperation natural to his dangerous position, he fired right into the lion's head, as he thought, almost touching it with the muzzle of his gun. He heard a terrible roar through the smoke, and the next moment was sent flying to one side, like a kitten.

He heard shouts and yells as he fell over, and two shots, and then the four Hamraus dashed past where he lay, as hard as they could tear. Manuel tried to get up, but he found his side so painful he could hardly move, and he felt very faint. He looked up, expecting to see the lion coming at him, but there it lay, stone dead, over his dead horse, and the others were gone. Then up came Bullard and Curtis, in great anxiety, to see if he was badly hurt.

"Oh! Wiseman," cried Tom, almost crying, "are you most dead, old fellow? Don't die, Wiseman! I killed the lion, just as he hit you that lick with his paw that sent you kiting. Where did he hit you?"

"Here, on my side, I believe," said Manuel, faintly. "Where are the rest?"

"Out there, catching Jesse!" said Bullard, vindictively. "Oh, Wiseman, if you could only sit up, and see them Arabs at 'em. There, that's it, old fellow; lean on me. Now look!"

Manuel looked, and almost forgot his pain in the excitement.

There were the four Hamrau Arabs, not a hundred yards off, fighting the two old lions, the fiercest of all. The horsemen seemed to be quite devoid of fear, for they swooped down at the lions, full speed,

and cut them as they passed. The lions charged after them, and the oldest one made a desperate attack on Abou Hassan, leaping after his horse, and getting one claw on its haunches. But the fearless Hamrau dealt him a fierce cut in the face, that drove the lion back, howling, and at the same moment Hamet came dashing up behind, on the right of the lion, stood up in his stirrups, and discharged a blow with both hands at the creature's back, taking it across the loins with his sword. It finished Mr. Lion's business, for he fell down; and when he tried to rise, he dragged his hind legs powerless on the ground, and could not spring. He was finished with a second cut on the neck. The other lion was a wary old fellow, who stood still, facing his foes, and seemed determined not to be flanked. As for the cub, he was running his "level best" toward the forest, and no one seemed to care where he went.

But the old lion was no easy conquest. They tried to entice him to charge, but he was too knowing. He kept making short rushes, snarling and growling, at the horses, but always keeping his face to his foes, and giving them no opportunity to serve him as they had his brother.

And then the Hamraus showed what splendid hunters they were. They drew off from the lion, as if they were going to leave him alone, and he, thinking himself safe, turned and bounded toward the forest to escape. Down rushed the four hunters like a whirlwind, two on each side, and each aimed a cut at him in passing. Too late the lion turned, for Abou Hassan's sword caught him on the back of the neck, as he sprang at Hamet, cut clear through the thick mane and strong hair, and took the great head half off, with the tremendous blow.

And down fell that lion, dead, while Abou Hassan and his brothers rode gently back to where Manuel was sitting down, feeling very sick. Then they told him how his first shot had only wounded the lion, who had knocked down his horse. His second shot had gone through the beast's neck, only making it more savage.

"And then," said Curtis, "he sprung at you, and gave you a side blow with his paw, and Tom and I fired together, and I guess we both hit him. Any-way, he dropped."

Then they examined Manuel's side, and found that the lion's paw had bruised him fearfully, but by great good luck had broken no bones. And that little stroke, made about as a cat would toss a ball of yarn aside, might have kept Manuel in camp for over a week, but for the Arabs, who cured him in a very singular manner. They wrapped him up in the warm skin of the lion which had knocked him over; and when he awoke, next morning, his bruises were almost gone, and he felt nearly well. This remedy is always practiced by the Arabs in case of bruises.

After a few days' rest, our friends resumed their hunting, and their next adventure was met with, after a great black rhinoceros.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BORELE.

THE application of the warm lion's skin cured Manuel's bruises in twenty-four hours, but he had received a shock that took him some days to recover from. When he was able to mount his horse it was several days after, and he did not care to go too near any more lions.

"I shall fire shells at them," he said. "They are sure to disable the beasts, and I shall keep at a safe distance."

Bullard and Curtis, however, had acquired somewhat of a contempt for the lions, for the animals did not come round their camp any more except at night. In the daytime, after their first battle, they could not see one. The beasts kept hid in close thickets, and were very scarce; for they seemed to have destroyed the principal family of the neighborhood; and one family is as much as most localities will support, in the way of lions.

But before Manuel was able to leave camp, Jack Curtis and Bullard had some pretty good hunting, and harried the large game of the neighborhood to some effect. The first day they went out Hamet went with them, for Abou Hassan and his brothers had gone to their own tribe, which they promised to bring back with them, to encamp along with the generous white strangers. Manuel was very glad of this, for he wanted to see the hamraus at home, and he knew that their presence would be a great protection from the thieving negroes of the country. These last had become a great nuisance, hanging around the camp to beg and pilfer what they could, and Manuel knew that they would not come around when the terrible Sword Hunters were encamped near them. So Abou Hassan left Hamet to show game, and rode off to his own people, whom he promised to bring back that night.

Curtis and Bullard went out soon after daylight with Hamet, seeing numerous herds of antelopes on the way, none of which did they disturb. The pretty creatures kept at a wary distance, but the hunters could watch their motions with a telescope to great advantage. There were many different kinds, of all sizes, from the tiny gazelle, with legs no thicker than a pencil, to the stately eland, with a body as large as an ox, the magnificent koodoo, with horns like corkscrews, at least four feet long, and the onyx, a large antelope, in shape much like a goat, but as tall as a donkey, with horns quite straight and very sharp. Then there was the sable antelope, as black as jet, with tanned points, the great roan antelope, and at least a dozen other kinds we have no time to mention. There were tall, graceful giraffes and sullen, lowering buffaloes, each kind in its own separate herds, feeding peacefully.

But Bullard cared for none of them. He had come

out to shoot a rhinoceros, and he was bound to have one, the more horns the better. He was not long in finding what he wanted, for the rhinoceros is an easy beast to hunt up. Before they had been out half an hour they saw two together, asleep under a tree at some distance. There was no cover all the way, and Hamet warned them that the rhinoceros has a remarkably keen scent. Therefore they had to ride round a long way before they got to leeward of the creatures, and slowly advanced toward them.

The rhinoceroses were both of the black, two-horned kind, considered the most ferocious of any, and known to the natives as the *borele*. They lay half asleep, with their heads turned to leeward, trusting to their noses to tell them of danger on the other side. But the sight of the rhinoceros is very poor, and he has a habit of shutting his eyes when he charges, so that our hunters anticipated little trouble in getting up to them. Hamet set them the example how to approach. The active Arab threw himself down alongside of his horse, with one arm around the animal's neck, and his leg over the saddle. In this manner he hung alongside of his horse, keeping the animal as a shield between him and the borele. Bullard had often practiced this trick as a boy on the plains, and Jack had learned it during his trip to the estancia at Buenos Ayres. The two therefore imitated Hamet as well as they knew how, and all three advanced on their sleeping game at an easy walk.

The two rhinoceroses lay blinking and snoring, just like two pigs, and if they saw the horsemen, probably took them for antelopes of some strange kind, for the hunters would sometimes let the reins loose, when of course the horses would stoop their heads to graze. And so the whole approach had a very natural air.

At last they had arrived within about fifty yards, when Hamet gave the signal, and the three instantly started up in their saddles.

But instead of the boreles being frightened at the sudden apparition the reverse was the case. They saw it quick enough. Almost before the hunters were up, the rhinoceroses were on their feet. They came up on all four legs together, like an India-rubber ball, and each uttered a sort of whistling squeal, something like a pig. And then with an agility unexpected from their clumsy frames, both charged together at the hunters, full of fury.

"Look out, Pickle," shouted Bullard, and as he spoke he sighted the head of the left hand borele with his rifle. Crack! went the gun, and Bullard heard the sharp smack of the bullet in the beast's head. But the rhinoceros did not seem to heed it, for he charged more viciously than ever. Tom's horse spun round on its haunches like a top, and "put like a streak," as "Plug" afterward observed.

Curtis fired a copper rifle shell into the other one, and saw it blow up on the beast's forehead. This was the female borele. But she did not seem to mind it any more than a musketo-bite, and Curtis's horse, with great prudence, followed Bullard as hard as he could tear. Jack did not fall off this time, a fact principally due to his being of the same mind with his horse, and turning with him.

And the two hunters, instead of putting their foes to flight, were just doing their level best to escape from the creatures they had started to kill. As for Hamet, he shied off to one side at the first onset, and the rhinoceroses did not appear to see him, for they passed on after the boys. But no sooner were they by, than down swooped Hamet after the female borele, spurring his horse desperately, and drawing his sword as he went.

Jack turned one way and Bullard the other, with the boreles after them, the horses thoroughly frightened, and running their best. But the clumsy, pig-like beasts behind gave them all the running they wanted for some minutes, before Hamet could overtake the cow borele. When he did, he made a tremendous cut at her hind leg, and divided the sinew fairly, making her hop on three legs. She did not appear to mind it, however, running nearly as fast as ever, and it was not till Hamet had made a second blow at the other leg, that she came to a stand.

When she did, she dropped, for both legs were utterly crippled. At the same moment the other borele, which had been chasing Tom Bullard, suddenly caught scent of him. The beast had chased him in a semicircle, till it had got to leeward, and caught a whiff for the first time. Instantly it stopped, gave a sniff of disgust, wheeled round and ran away. The same creature it had chased before became suddenly terrible when it was discovered to be a man.

No sooner was the borele off, than away went Tom after it. As he went, he crammed a fresh cartridge into his gun, and spurred his horse hard, to keep near the flying game. Curtis and Hamet both joined in, but Tom had the start by fifty yards, and was not twenty feet from the borele, when the brute turned. He had not much distance to make up, therefore, but it taxed his little horse to its utmost to do that much. However, by a vigorous dose of the long spurs, he managed to creep up to within ten feet, and further than that his horse would not go. The animal remembered the chase it had undergone before, and feared a fresh charge.

So Tom was forced to fire from where he was, or lose his game. He had a shell this time in his rifle, and he took a hasty aim behind the shoulder of borele, and fired. Clap! went the ball into the tough hide, and the borele stopped short, quivered and shook, fell on its knees, rose again, and staggered away slowly, shaking its heavy head in evident distress. Tom had another cartridge in before the beast was fairly up, and sent a second shell into borele's body. That finished his business. As the second fearful missile exploded in the poor brute's

lungs, it stopped again, trembled all over, and fell over on its side, dying. Tom was a merciful fellow, if he was a hunter. He reloaded with a steel-pointed bullet, jumped off his horse, and put the bullet into the dying borele's brain, to end its torments. Then Curtis and the Arab came up, and found him examining the body for the trace of bullets.

It was made quite plain why he had not killed the rhinoceros with the first shot in the forehead. The creature's head is a mass of solid bone, as hard as a rock, and the brain is very small and situated not far from the nose, where the monstrous shield of horn renders it perfectly invulnerable. A side shot is the only chance by which the brain can be reached, and then the shot is very difficult.

But it is easy enough to strike it in the lungs, and when an explosive bullet is used, even the tough rhinoceros, which will carry off fifty common balls and live, succumbs at once to the suffocating gases. And from that day forth, Tom never used anything else on elephants and other large game, for his experience with the rhinoceros had converted him entirely to the use of shells, which he had before condemned as unsportsmanlike.

"But when a fellow has to pin his life to his gun," remarked Tom to Curtis, "it don't do to be too particular; so we'll blow them all to scratch for the future."

They cut out the horns of the two boreles with very little trouble. The horn of the rhinoceros is a very curious affair in this respect. It does not grow *out* of the bone like a cow's horn, but is simply stuck on to the skin in some manner, so that if you cut away the piece of skin, off comes the horn with it. They found it of very tough, fine horn, and solid all the way through. The borele has not such long horns as the great white rhinoceros, called the *kooboba*. This beast is near as large as an elephant, and its horn is sometimes four feet long, and very white and clear. The white rhinoceros is a peaceful, timid beast, rarely charging, except in defense of its calf, and much slower of foot than the borele. The horns of both seem to be used to root with, like pigs, and they tear up strong, thorny bushes with them like tufts of grass, eating thorns and all, while the rhinoceroses have palates that are as hard as iron.

Our hunters returned home with their trophies, and tried some rhinoceros meat that night. It was uncommonly good eating and reminded them of veal. They found Abou Hassan's family or tribe, forty men, all told, with women and children, going into camp.

CHAPTER X.

TOM AND THE WILD ASS.

THAT evening the principal men of the little tribe of Sword Hunters were gathered around the campfire of our three friends. When I say the "tribe" of Sword Hunters, you must not think that they were all of the Hamraus, who are a powerful and numerous tribe. This was only the sub-tribe or band, to which Abou Hassan and his brothers belonged, and was composed of one single family, from the great grandfather, an aged Arab over a hundred years old, down to Abou Hassan and his brothers, and their children.

The old chief, or *sheikh*, as the Arabs call him, was a magnificent-looking old man, tall and erect as the youngest there, and riding his gray mare like a centaur. His descendants obeyed his slightest beck and nod as if it were a law, and the old sheikh was an absolute monarch in his band, without a rebel among them all.

Manuel and the boys were wonderfully taken with this stately old gentleman, with his long, snow-white beard and princely manner, who behaved as though he had been used to good society all his life. And so he was, for the nobler tribes of Arabs are *gentlemen*, in the truest sense of the word—that is to say, always polite, hospitable, brave, generous and kind to all.

It was interesting to notice how they all venerated the old man, listening to every word with respect, and not contradicting. He, on his part, was very kind to every one, and seemed especially fond of children.

The boys found him a perfect mine of information on hunting, for Sheikh Haroun Abd-el-Kerim had wielded a sword in the chase over eighty years before, and knew every bush in the country.

His name—Haroun Abd-el-Kerim—signifies "Aaron, servant of the Merciful," and all the Arab names have a significance, except the proper names, such as Hamet, etc.

Hamet means John, Hamet is a variety of Mohammed. Abdallah means "Servant of God," Selim is a variety of Islam, or the "Chosen People," and most of our Bible names have Arab equivalents.

"Are there any beasts so dangerous, oh! sheikh," asked Manuel, "that you cannot kill them with the sword?"

"Not one," said the sheikh, quietly. "If we can close with them they cannot escape. But some few, very few, are too swift for us."

"Ah, I suppose you mean antelopes!"

"No," said Sheikh Haroun. "We can come up with any antelope but one, after a hard chase. But the gazelle laughs at the speed of the horse, and the wild ass is even swifter. There is no horse can equal him, and he mocks at the best in our tribe."

Tom Bullard, who was listening, pricked his ears.

"How big are these wild asses?" he asked.

"As tall as a horse. Taller than mine," the Arab answered.

"Are there any here?"

"Nay," said the Sheikh Haroun; "the wild ass loves the desert. The nearest place to find them is at the border of the desert, a day's journey from

here. There is a troop of them, which come to drink at a spring, at the foot of a mountain there, and they have come since I was a boy. We have lain in wait for them many a time, but no man has been near enough to see the color of their eyes, though many have tried."

"Do you think I could catch one?" demanded Tom, suddenly. "I know I can; and if you'll show me where they are, I'll show you how we catch wild horses in America."

Sheikh Haroun did not answer for a minute. He was too polite to tell Tom he was a fool, but he thought it. In the first place he had never heard of a wild horse, for in Africa there are none except tame. And in the next place he knew the swiftness of the wild ass to be prodigious.

"You are a stranger, my son," he said, presently, "and you do not know the wild ass. We have no wild horses here. You say you have them in your country, and of course you must be right; but they are not like our wild asses, or else your horses must be much better than ours. I will show you where they are, but you can do nothing with them, except perhaps to shoot them, and that would be foolish, for they are not made to eat."

"Well," persisted Tom, stubbornly, "if you will show me the place, I will promise you to ride a wild ass into your camp inside of ten days from the time I see them. You have shown us how you hunt, and now we will show you how we do the thing in Texas."

So it was settled that they should move camp the next day, for Tom was all on fire to catch a wild ass, and he felt confident that he could do it by practicing a plan used in Texas. What that plan is, you will perceive when you shall hear what Tom did.

Manuel and Jack were as incredulous as the old sheikh, till Tom explained the mode of doing things, and then they were as anxious to try it as he was, for they felt that, with such swift steeds to ride, they could catch any thing in the country with ease, from the elephant to the swiftest antelope.

So the next morning they once more broke camp, and traveled all day long to the south-west, the country growing drier and more barren as they proceeded, till the afternoon brought them to the foot of the mountain the chief had spoken of, which was the extreme spur of a range, that thenceforward barred the green country from the Lybian desert. As they came in sight of the sandy plain below, Sheikh Haroun pointed to a clump of palm trees, and then to some moving dots on the plain.

"Behold the spring," he said. "The wild asses are coming to drink at it. They will come again in the morning. But you cannot catch them."

Tom drew out his telescope and inspected the moving dots. They were indeed wild asses, but very different from our donkeys and mules. They were splendid creatures, the old males standing sixteen hands high, with powerful limbs, broad chests, and strong necks. The long ears were the only asinine features about them, and they were not near as long as those of the domestic ass.

Tom suddenly started, as if struck with an idea.

"I'll try it," he muttered. "I could not have a better chance than now."

At his desire, Manuel halted the caravan where they were, while Tom dismounted, and crept forward, behind rocks and bushes, till he was within about twenty yards of the spring, where the wild asses were coming to drink. Then he lay down behind a rock, and awaited their approach.

The wind was blowing from the desert toward him, so that there was no danger of their scenting him, and he had hidden his advance so well that they had not caught sight of him, attracted as they were by the distant caravan, going into camp where Tom had left them.

The troop of wild asses came nearer and nearer, gazing curiously at the caravan, but anticipating no evil. Tom counted fifteen altogether; of which three were magnificent males, of a bright sorrel color, with the peculiar black cross-stripe on the withers, characteristic of their race; and four were little colts, of different sizes, up to two years old.

The young Texan rested his rifle on the forked branch of the bush that hid him, and patiently waited the coming of the troop. He was going to try a very hazardous experiment, peculiar to his native plains, called "creasing." It requires a first-class shot to try it successfully, but, when well performed, furnishes the surest way of capturing a swift animal yet known. Tom felt sufficient confidence in his skill to try it. He had brought with him several straps, which he proposed to use, if his shot was successful, to secure his prize, and he already counted on it as his own.

The wild asses came slowly down to the spring, often stopping and looking suspiciously at the caravan, and then coming on again. At last the leader of the herd put down his head, and drank delicately, and then pricked up his ears, and looked round away from Tom.

It was the chance the young man was looking for. The next minute he took a long and steady aim at the wild creature. He aimed just behind the ears, where the arching neck joined the head, and intended his bullet to *crash the spot just stunning the animal*. Tom's nerves were like iron, and his eyes perfectly true, as he glanced through the sights.

He pulled the trigger, and through the flash and smoke saw the wild ass drop, as if dead, while the rest scoured away, in a cloud of dust, and went out of sight.

Out rushed Tom, rifle in hand, to view the prize, and found, to his intense joy, that the creature breathed. The bullet had marked a little "crease," exactly where it was aimed, and the wild creature was completely stunned. A hair's breadth lower, and it would have been killed.

Tom lost no time in looking. He produced from

his pocket a strong strap, doubled up one fore leg of the wild ass, where it lay, and strapped it tight, just as circus-men had been in the habit of doing for many years, before Rarey made the secret public.

In a moment more he had a strong halter on the animal's head, and secured it just in time, for, as he stepped away, the wild ass struggled to get up, having recovered from the momentary stun.

And the way that creature struggled was exciting to see. Tom had never seen the like. The boy, as we know, was a splendid rider, and had on long spurs. Taking his advantage as the ass put out its fore leg to rise, he was on its back before it could get up. The halter was a strong cord, knotted around the animal's under jaw, with a rein on each side, and Bullard held on to it like grim death. The ass had one fore leg doubled up and strapped there, but it rose upon three legs with a squeal of rage, and commenced to kick. Yes, actually to *kick* with both hind-legs, *standing on one fore leg to do it!* A horse could not have performed this feat, but the wild ass, like the zebra, has a peculiar hardness and strength of muscle that enables it to perform deeds that are impossible to a horse, as Rarey found when he tamed the zebra. For a few minutes Bullard had hard work to retain his seat. But even the wild ass is subject to fatigue. With one leg tied up, it could not struggle to any advantage, and the boy had a terrible hold upon the beast. It reared upright and came over backward, and Bullard was on his feet unhurt, and up again before the wild creature could rise. It tried to bite him in the leg, but Bullard was expecting the trick, and had a heavy whip hanging to his wrist, which he curled round the slim muzzle of the wild ass with a sharp lash every time it tried it. The animal was mad with rage. It squealed and reared up, only to be pulled back sharply by the self-possessed Bullard. He heard shouts of admiration from the Arabs, who were now galloping at full speed, in the notion of assisting him in some way.

But Tom Bullard needed no assistance. He was bound to conquer that wild ass if he had to fight all night, and the sun was nearly setting already. With a vague notion of tiring the creature out, he dug in his spurs till they fetched the blood, and wrenched its head round to the desert. The furious beast gave a tremendous bound, and suddenly darted forward, on three legs as it was, swifter than any horse could run-away, away, into the fast-darkening desert, while Tom, with a wild halloo, laid on his whip to make it go faster.

"Now I've got you!" muttered he, setting his teeth as he flew on. "We'll see who can stand this longest, you or I."

And away went the two, out into the silent desert, where the stars looked softly down upon them, the wild ass leaving the horses far behind, and making Bullard think:

"If he runs like this on *three legs*, what chance should I have had with him on *four legs*?"

CHAPTER XI.

"SEE, THE CONQUERING HERO COMES!"

For some minutes after the wild ass carried away Tom Bullard to the desert, the motion of the animal was so rapid as almost to take away the boy's breath. With only one fore leg to use, the creature ran as fast as a race-horse. In two minutes more, Tom was far out of sight of the palm trees by the spring, in the deep soft sand of the desert. At the same tremendous speed his wild charger continued to carry him for nearly a quarter of an hour more, exerting itself to the utmost, and still pressing straight ahead. And then at last its efforts began to abate, and Tom could feel that it was failing. Its strength must have been tremendous, to do what it had done.

But Bullard was not disposed to give his mount any rest. Its conquest depended on its being thoroughly tired out. Tom had heard of Rarey, and how he had conquered the most ferocious horses, and the zebra, said to be untamable; and the boy had made up his mind that the equally ferocious wild ass should be tamed by him. So he put spurs to the animal, gave it a fierce cut with the whip, and away went the wild ass as fast as ever. But, this spurt did not last as long as the first. The creature was nearly tired out, as it was.

In a state of nature the wild ass will go a mile in a minute, and will gallop for hours faster than any horse can follow. When it trots, no running horse can come near it, and Dexter would be beaten in such a race. But, with one leg tied up, even the wild ass began to give in, and when it slackened its pace the second time, Tom could feel, from its motions, that it was nearly exhausted.

Finally it halted reeking with sweat, and trembling violently. Tom could feel it slowly shaking under him, and when at last it fell on its knees on the sand, the boy was prepared for it. He pulled his head over to one side, so as to guide it in falling, and kept still on the animal's back, his feet on the ground on either side. For nearly a minute the wild ass remained on its knees, with its hind-quarters in the air, hesitating whether it should not have just one struggle more; and then, at last, it gave way, and fell over on its side with a thump, quite tired out.

Tom was perfectly cool. He whipped out of his pocket the second strap he had provided, stooped down and strapped up the *free* fore leg of the animal, and not till then did he get off.

There lay the wild desert king, bound, and perfectly helpless, both fore legs doubled up, and secured with straps it had no power to break. Tom took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. He was completely tired himself, and glad of the respite.

After a while he went to his prize, and commenced to pat its head softly. He kept behind its back, out

of danger of its heels, and found the benefit of his precautions; for, no sooner had he touched it, than the animal began to struggle again, making vicious attempts to bite. But Tom was too wary to be caught, and moreover, the wild ass was quite helpless.

It rose on its knees, and actually succeeded in rearing up on its hind legs, bound as it was. But the effort was all in vain. Its wild struggles only tended to make it more exhausted, and when it came down there was Tom at its head, pulling the off-rein desperately, so as to keep the beast from biting him, and still hanging on.

A succession of such wild struggles lasted for near half an hour, and then the wild creature gave in, and lay still, panting and heaving. Tom again patted and stroked its head, talking soothingly to it, and met with no more resistance this time. He continued his caresses and gentle handlings, passing down the neck to the body, and handling the wild ass down to its very heels. When he came to the hocks, it kicked desperately for a few times, but Tom stuck to it, and finally succeeded in taking up both hind feet, one after another, letting them fall like sticks of wood, the animal making no effort to retain them.

Then he knew that the beast was conquered, for it lay there quite quiet and contented. So he went to work and unstrapped the two fore legs, one after the other, stretching them out; and still the wild ass made no effort to rise. It lay there as quiet as a lamb, tamed at last.

Tom was too cautious to give it perfect freedom before he was on its back. He did not dare to trust a creature that had given him so much trouble. So he doubled up the fore legs again, and rolled the wild ass up on its knees, mounting it in that posture. He had to practice a great deal of encouragement before he could get it to rise, and when it did, Tom was on its back.

But the wild creature was tamed at last. The longer and harder an animal fights the more completely it is subdued when it yields. Tom shook his rein, and his strange charger moved off at a slow walk, as gentle as a lamb. He pulled the rein, and it halted, and permitted him to dismount and mount again without any trouble, besides buckling on a narrow surcingle, which he took out of that inexhaustible coat-pocket. This surcingle was Tom's own invention, and had two loops of stiff leather sewed to it, which served as stirrups, being just the right length, when his legs hung down, to put his feet in. They had this great advantage over common stirrups, that they *wouldn't come up*, and if the rider kept his feet in them, no animal could throw him, let it jump ever so hard. Tom called this invention his "patent riding-master," for the poorest rider could stick on with it. He thought it quite possible he might need it when his prize recovered its strength.

But when he had mounted and got his feet into the loops, it seemed as if his fears were groundless. The wild ass kept on at a walk, and had no disposition to run as yet. Tom allowed it to take its own way at first, for he had no idea where he was. The night was dark, for the moon had not risen yet, as it was getting into the last quarter. The Texan looked at the stars for his guides, but nowhere could he see the pole star, for the Great Bear and Pointers, which he had been accustomed to use, to find it out, were far below the horizon. In those southern latitudes, near the equator, the pole star is very near the horizon, and hard to find. Its place is taken by the beautiful constellation called the Southern Cross, and this Tom at last hit on, and used for his guide.

He set out then on his return to the east, from whence he had come, allowing his prize to walk slowly to recover its strength. This wild ass was not slow to do. Bullard kept feeling its neck with his hand, and found the sweat rapidly drying, and the creature cooling off.

It began to step out more briskly, too, for the strength and endurance of the wild ass are wonderful. It will go two or three days without food or drink, at a fast pace all the time, and even the struggle with its tamer had not, except for a few minutes, materially weakened it.

Presently Tom shook the rein, and the animal began to trot, with long, proud steps, that in a horse would have been terribly rough, but in the wild ass were quite smooth. It hardly seemed to touch the earth, bounding up and down as it on springs, and increased its pace every minute. This was what Tom wanted, for he was an ardent trotter. He settled to his work, and shot away at a speed that fairly took his breath at first. It beat all the trotting Tom had ever seen or heard of, and every minute he seemed to be going faster.

"Where's Flora Temple now?" muttered Tom, gripping the reins firmly. "Dexter wouldn't be nowhere here! Go along, old boy! I'll bet my last shirt-button on your heels!"

And away he went to the eastward, leaving a long trail of dust behind him, and nearing the mountains fast. He thought he was going straight for the camp of his friends, and pictured to himself his own triumph, and the amazement of the Hamrahs when he should be so much better than his promise. His lucky "creasing bullet" had worked wonders. He had hardly dared to hope for so early a chance, trusting to lying out in the desert, after long and careful observation of the animals, and trying a long shot. But chance had brought the troop within less than half the distance he had hoped for, and his perfect shooting had done the business.

In about twenty minutes of rapid trotting Tom had gone several miles. He began to see the dark looming of mountains ahead of him, outlined against a faint white glow, and he knew that the moon was rising. With a cry of joy he shook his rein, and his

charger broke up at once, and went ahead full gallop, so fast that Tom could see nothing for the winter in his eyes at first. The speed took away his breath too. When he got a little used to it, he dashed away the tears produced by the whizzing wind, and looked ahead. A long way off, and a little to the right, he saw some glittering lights, and felt that he was near home at last. They were camp-fires.

He turned the head of his wild steed toward the distant fires, and gave a shout. Away went the wild ass faster than ever, and the miles seemed to vanish like smoke under his flying hoofs.

Tom bent his head over on the beast's neck, and urged it on. In a few minutes more he was close to the fires, and in the shadow of a lofty chain of mountains. He pulled hard at the reins, and the wild ass slackened his pace with perfect obedience. And then Tom wiped his eyes and looked round him, There, sure enough, were the camp-fires of the Arabs, and the low black tents spread around them. But he did not see the white tents of his own party.

He pulled up short, and looked round. There were the mountains and the palm-tree spring, sure enough. Perhaps Manuel had not pitched tents that night, but was bivouacking, the night being fine, or perhaps was out hunting for him. Anyway, he galloped in, quite unsuspiciously, and was in the midst of the fires before he realized that he had made a mistake.

The Arabs were not Hamraus!

The Hamraus wear long, curled hair. These men had great mops of bushy wool, like Feejee Islanders. They were strangers, and probably enemies.

As Tom dashed into the camp like a whirlwind, on the wild ass, a crowd of dark figures leaped up with sword and shield. A few had long guns, which they pointed at him menacingly, and all shouted in Arabic:

"ENTA MEN?" (Who are you?)

Tom couldn't stop to tell them. He was totally unarmed, having dropped his rifle when he seized the wild ass. He wheeled short round, leaped over a fire, and dashed through a group of Arabs, several shots whizzing past his head as he went. He saw several men jump on their horses, which stood, ready saddled, close by, and come tearing after him, sword in hand.

Tom laid on his whip, and flew off, leaving the galloping horses as if they had been standing still. Then he realized at once what a treasure he had gained in the wild ass. It seemed to him as if he would not fear to ride alone through the whole breadth of Sahara, on such a swift and tireless steed. He heard the Arabs calling out to each other behind, and then the cries faded away in the distance, and he was alone.

He slackened his pace and looked around. He saw where he had made his mistake. The mountain was not the same mountain, and the spring was differently situated, though it looked the same at first.

Tom stopped and considered. He knew that the chain ran to the south, and therefore he must keep to the north to get to his own camp. He was too old in prairie experience, young as he was, to be lost in the desert. As the moon rose, not more than half full, the young Texan looked back. He could see the Arabs still galloping on, and rapidly nearing him, for he was riding at a walk. The love of mischief, natural to all boys, made him wish to give the Arabs a chase, for he was sure they must have taken his mount for a horse, in the sudden burst in the darkness, and no doubt imagined they could catch him.

So he continued on at a slow walk, singing as he went, and soon heard the Arabs coming up. He looked round, and there were about a dozen fellows, with shields and swords, within a hundred yards of him. Tom shook his rein, and started at a gentle trot, the Arabs still gaining on him. When they were not more than sixty feet off, the boy gave a shout, gathered up his animal, and trotted away at an amazing pace. The Arabs shouted and yelled, spurred violently, and used their best endeavors, but they could not gain an inch. On the contrary, the wild ass drew away from them at first slowly, but, as he got warmed, more rapidly. And then Tom began to pull at the bridle, to let his pursuers come up. He designed to lead them on near his own camp, when the Hamraus would soon fix them.

His ruse was successful. The Arabs kept getting closer, and fancied they were gaining. Every now and then, Tom would turn round and shake his whip at them, daring them to follow, and then shooting away at increased speed. He saw that his pursuers had no fire-arms, or he might not have been so rash. Anyway he led them on, their horses laboring terribly, the wild ass going as easy as ever, and apparently untired. He began to recognize the country ahead of him now, and was not surprised when he suddenly turned a spur of the mountain, to see the unmistakable camp-fires of the Hamraus, and Manuel's blue and white tent standing in the midst. A few minutes more, and he trotted into camp, shouting:

"To arms, Hamraus! Here are your enemies!"

CHAPTER XII.

MAKING READY FOR THE DESERT ROBBERS.

The camp was all in confusion in a moment. Twenty Hamraus were on their feet in a moment, running to their horses. The strange Arabs had halted at the sight of the camp, and were running away. But their horses were tired, while those of the Hamraus were fresh. Tom did not stay in camp to tell his story. He shouted for a sword. Tom had been converted to the use of the sword since he had seen what wounds it gave, in the hands of hard hitters.

One of the younger Hamraus, who had no horse,

eagerly handed him his own. Tom tucked it under his thigh, as he had seen the Arabs do, and was off like a shot. The Hamraus were already out, and slowly gaining on the strange Arabs. Tom went off at full speed this time, and came up with his enemies with perfect ease. Out dashed his sword, and the Texan made his first cut, just as he had seen Abou Hassan do, but it was not at the leg of the horse. It was at the neck of the rider. The Arab threw up his hard rhinoceros-hide shield, and parried the blow, but Tom was on his left side, so that he was unable to return it with any effect. Bullard was utterly unused to handling a sword, but he could cut and slash like the best. His wild steed was his greatest difficulty, for it shied away, frightened at the swords, and he could not get near enough to cut. This was perhaps lucky for him, as he had no shield, and the sword of the Arab was as sharp as a razor. Moreover, the man knew how to use it, and was much stronger than Tom Bullard.

But if Tom could not hurt the Arab, he could delay him, and he did delay the whole of them for some minutes, the Hamraus coming up all the while. At last these latter were close enough to join in the fight, and then it was soon over. With thirty flashing swords around them, the strange Arabs surrendered, and were brought into camp, several of them badly wounded, for these razor-like swords had only to give a slight slash to inflict terrible wounds.

One man had his hand taken off at the wrist, another's horse was killed, and the whole party was much cast down at their defeat.

Then it turned out that these were desert Arabs, belonging to a powerful tribe, old enemies of the Hamraus. Abou Hassan told Tom that he was very lucky to have escaped as he did.

"If they had taken you, they would have made a slave of you," said the Arab, "and we should never have seen you again. Now we can very likely make peace with these men, by giving them back their prisoners, and compelling them to swear good faith on the Koran."

Sheikh Haroun was very much pleased with the boy's daring feat.

"My son," he said, "you have done what no other man ever did before—ridden a wild ass, as you said you would. I thought you were but a boasting boy, but you have done a man's work this night. I wish that we had you in our tribe. You should be treated as my own son."

Curtis was never tired of admiring the beautiful creature that now stood in the midst of their camp, frightened at the fires, but quite still. Tom sent for a pair of hobbles, with which he confined both forelegs of the wild ass, and Manuel assisted him in securing it for the night. They had but little sleep. Every one was too anxious. They knew that, when the strange Arabs discovered the loss of their warriors, they would, in all probability, come after them in numbers far exceeding those of the Hamraus. Wherefore everybody collected his arms, and prepared for battle. The Hamraus were strapping their swords, the only weapons they used. Manuel and his friends put on their revolvers and ammunition-pouches, kept their rifles ready, and hung their swords in their belts. Ever since they had seen the Hamraus, they had had their servants at work sharpening these last, and had them as sharp as those of the Arabs, although much lighter. The Hamraus prefer heavy swords, which will deal terrible cuts, but they know very little of fencing.

That night Tom Bullard came to Curtis, with a strange request for him.

"Jack," he said, "suppose you teach me how to use a sword. I'd no idea the ordinary thing was so difficult. I cut at that cuss of an Arab to-night six or seven times, and the fellow poked out his shield caught it every time, and, would you believe it, I didn't so much as cut his shield once, while Abou Hassan only gave one clip, and off came a man's hand at the wrist!"

Curtis laughed. He had grown much stronger since the time the Chaco Indian had defeated him so ignominiously on the pampas. He had been practicing with Manuel, and the two had taken lessons in Paris, as they passed through, of a celebrated fencer named Robert. Moreover, he knew how to ride, military fashion, now, which is half the secret of using a sword on horseback. If the horse is not trained to obey the rein and leg, half of the swordsman's cuts are wasted in air, when its chargers shies. So Jack proceeded to enlighten Tom.

"You must have cut with the flat of the blade," he said. "That's what beginners are always doing. The sword turns in their hand and they don't know it, and think it doesn't cut. I'll teach you all I know, and if you like, we'll begin to-night; for you'll want to know something to-morrow morning. At all events you can learn to cut. Leave the other men to do the guarding."

So Tom went to work at once, practicing all the cuts and thrusts, and Manuel showed him how a thrust was always best in single combat, because it kept the body covered better than a cut, besides being more dangerous.

"But, if you are beset by several people," he told him, "don't thrust, for if you run a man through, the next may cut you down, before you can get your sword out; and look out you don't hit your own horse on the head, which beginners are always doing."

While Jack and Tom were practicing sword exercise, Manuel was attending to fortifying the camp with a fence of loose stones, and getting his people into order. The cowardly Egyptian camel-drivers were very much frightened, and would have run away if they had dared. The strange Arabs belonged to a tribe called the Beni Hallowin or Sons of Hallowin, dreaded by the dwellers on the borders of the desert for their ferocity. The Hamraus were

always fighting them, and admitted that they were good warriors.

"But the Hamraus fear no one on earth," said Sheikh Haroun, proudly; "and we have killed many of the Beni Hallowin ere this. They are wolves of the desert, and we are the lions of the mountains. To-morrow, my sons, you shall see them scattered like the sand before the wind."

Manuel did not feel much alarm about the result of the battle. All or nearly all of his men had long Arab muskets, and he had taught them to reserve their fire till he ordered them to shoot. It was settled that in the morning, if the Beni Hallowin attacked them—Sheikh Haroun said that they were sure to do it just before daylight, if at all—Curtis and Tom Bullard were to stay in camp, as the best shots, and superintend the camel-drivers and servants, to hold them to defend the breastwork. Manuel and the Hamraus were to go out of camp on horseback, and to fall on the enemy in the rear while they were engaged in front, using the sword only.

Tom Bullard was so much attached to Manuel that he offered to lend him the wild ass to ride, which nothing else would have made him do to a soul.

"For you kin beat me riding," he admitted. "You kin beat any of us, and you kin use a sword like a ring-tailed squealer, Wiseman. If you have to shoot, though, remember what I says: git as close as ever you kin, afore you pulls trigger. One shot across that table is worth fifty 'cross lots. You see if it ain't, Wiseman. I've be'n thar!"

So the night wore away in preparation, and as the morning approached, Manuel mounted the wild ass, using Tom's "patent riding-master" in case of accidents, put on over his own little gaucho saddle, in which he rode from preference. Manuel had a saber as sharp as a razor, and a pair of revolvers; and as he was now eighteen, and well grown, he looked a pretty tough customer to tackle.

He left the Hamraus in rear of the camp, standing by their horses, and rode softly around to the front, at a walk. The wild ass was quite submissive, and seemed to recognize it had found a master. The young Spaniard was out in the desert very soon, and rode softly on toward the camp of the Beni Hallowin. As he had anticipated, they were coming, bright and early. He heard low voices ahead of him and the tramp of horses, before he had gone two hundred yards away.

Manuel halted, dismounted, lay down on the sand, and looked ahead through the gloom, for it was so dark that he could see nothing from the saddle. He beheld a dense mass of dark figures on horseback outlined against the starlit sky.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BENI HALLOWIN.

The strangers were coming silently on, all together, and Manuel judged that there must be over a hundred men in the crowd. He felt comforted, for with the forty Hamraus and his own men, he had about eighty in his camp, with thirty-five guns. He saw several long muskets on the shoulders of the horsemen, but that did not alarm him. He knew that shooting from a horse is very uncertain work, whereas his own men were on foot, with rocks to rest their guns on.

He waited for a little time, till his enemies were getting too close to be agreeable, when he threw the reins over his beast's neck and mounted. The Arabs were so close, when he got up, that he could dimly see their dark crowd from the saddle. Manuel drew a revolver, pointed it at a venture, and fired a shot into the dark mass to alarm the camp. The next minute the wild ass gave a frightened bound, wheeled round, and sped off like an arrow past the camp, where the fires were all smoldering dimly, in white embers.

Manuel had a powerful Mameluke bit in the creature's mouth, the same as the South American bit, with an iron ring encircling the lower jaw, instead of a curb-chain. Had it not been for this, he never could have stopped his frightened chargers in time. The tremendous force of the bit brought it on its haunches, however, and he galloped back to camp, pulling hard most of the way.

But his shot had raised a tempest behind him. One of the Beni Hallowin must have got off during the night to alarm his comrades, or they would not have been up so promptly in the morning. They had hoped to return the surprise of the night, and instead of that, Manuel had surprised them. They returned his shot with a volley of musket-bullets, aimed at random, charging down on the camp with a grand yell.

Manuel raced into camp, leaped the breastwork, and shouted out:

"Lights! Lights! Quick!"

Instantly the little boys of the Hamraus, who were standing ready by the fires, threw on armfuls of dry grass, followed by withered thorn bushes, and up started seven or eight big blazes which lighted up everything, outside and in. The defenders of the camp could see the dense body of their enemies come charging down, spreading as they advanced, and some distance off yet.

Jack Curtis and Bullard went up and down the lines of their men; who were kneeling behind the breastwork, and exhorted them to keep cool and not fire before the word. The Egyptians were pale and trembling, but behaved pretty well, as their race will under white officers.

The blaze of the fires shot up higher than ever, and the Arabs came charging down. They could not see the musketeers, who were hidden by the rocks, but they saw the little troop of mounted Hamraus,

waiting behind the camp, and as they neared the breastwork, the whole body swerved round, and came sweeping along the face of it, in a dense crowd within twenty yards. Suddenly Bullard fired off his revolver into their midst, Jack Curtis followed, and the camel-drivers poured in a close volley, which wonderfully inspired them, while it demoralized their opponents.

The Beni Hallowin were terribly punished by the volley. The light of the fires blinded and confused them, while it favored their antagonists. Tom and Curtis fired off their revolvers as fast as they could pull the triggers, and the shots told on the packed mass in front every time.

The Arabs fell into disorder, halted, swayed to and fro, and their discomfiture was completed by the Hamraus; for Manuel, seizing the opportune moment, gave the signal to charge, and away went the terrible swordsmen with a yell, Garcia far ahead of them, on the swift desert steed.

The charge settled the matter at once. Before the Hamraus could exchange cuts, the enemy were in full flight, and what followed was a perfect slaughter. In five minutes both parties were scattered all over the desert, the Hamraus cutting the Beni Hallowin all to pieces. Even the old sheikh was out with the foremost, forgetting all his desire to make peace with his powerful foe, and they were chased up to their very camp, which the Hamraus entered pell-mell with their foes, and quickly plundered of all valuables.

The Beni Hallowin had fought pretty well, too, and were provided with shields as well as swords, but the Hamraus had a skill and quickness at their weapons which the others seemed unable to meet.

Manuel Garcia found no difficulty in hitting the shield-armed Arabs. He would make a feint at the head, and up would go the shield to guard it, intercepting the Arab's sight for a moment. That moment was sufficient for a quick swordsman, and the next minute would see the bright, keen blade slashing a leg half off left unguarded by the shield.

As they dashed into the camp, the women and children ran shrieking into the black tents, the camels bellowed, the herds of sheep feeding near ran bleating about, and the cattle took to their heels in affright. The few remaining warriors threw down their arms, begging for mercy, and the victory was won. Manuel was pleased to see that the Hamraus were as merciful as they were brave, and did not indulge in useless slaughter.

Sheikh Haroun exacted a heavy ransom from the flocks and herds of the Beni Hallowin, and compelled their sheikh and all the warriors to swear eternal peace with his band of Hamraus on the Koran, which, you know, is the Mahometan Bible; and as the Arabs are all nominally Mahometans, that is the only oath they recognize as binding.

Then Hamraus and whites alike came away from the humbled Beni Hallowin, very glad to have settled their business for them so quickly. They returned to camp and rested some days, during which Manuel and Jack both went to work to tame and train the wild ass, taking turns at the operation. It proved by no means so stubborn as they had anticipated and ere long they had broken it perfectly to hear all sorts of noises, including firearms, like an old trooper, while it fairly amazed them with its speed.

And then it was that Manuel, becoming ambitious of taking another to match it for his own use, proposed that they should try to run down the rest of the troop on his back, and catch them with the lasso. And Tom consented that Manuel should try it, for the young Spaniard was as skillful as a gaucho with the lasso.

CHAPTER XIV.

MANUEL'S LUCK.

It was no easy matter to find the wild asses again. They are peculiarly shy creatures, and retreat into the trackless desert when molested, often going a hundred and fifty miles to the nearest oasis or green island in the sand, when they have been disturbed. Our friends never again saw the troop from which Tom had struck down the leader.

But the Hamraus, who knew the country perfectly, promised them more at another spring further on, and soon after they moved camp to the desired place, and pitched their tents at a short distance from the water. They were hidden from view by a ridge of rocks, and Manuel would not allow the creatures to be disturbed the first night. The Arabs told them that they would come again in the morning, and would not be so shy then as at night, so Manuel arranged his forces for the hunt. By a careful inspection of the wild asses through the telescope, he found that the troop was pretty numerous, nearly twenty all told. He concluded to let Tom and Curtis lie in wait at a suitable distance, and try the "creasing" plan on the two finest males, while he himself prepared to use his own national weapons, the lasso and bolas.

You know what the bolas is, boy—a sort of three-tailed cat, with a ball at the end of each tail. It is whirled around the head and thrown at an animal's legs, which it twists around in a general snarl. Being so light, one man can carry several bolas at a time. Manuel took four of them along, besides the lasso, intending to use the latter last. The Hamraus were full of interest now, and anxious to help. Manuel selected five or six of the best mounted, and told them to be ready to follow him at a signal. He knew that they could not hope to come up with the wild asses, but he hoped they would get up in time to save and confine the entangled ones before they could get free. Manuel himself was to ride the wild ass. From his gaucho habits as a boy, he had learned

that a ridden horse can always catch a free one, and he trusted the same to be the case with the wild ass.

Long before dawn they were all at their posts, and waiting for the wild troop.

The sun came nearer and nearer to the horizon, and the dawn grew stronger, and, true to time, they could see the graceful creatures coming in from the desert to drink. All night long they had been pasturing on the rough, thorny bushes that are scattered here and there in the sandy waste, their only food. As in the first troop, there were several foals running by their mothers in the usual manner. Manuel had set his heart upon having some of these, and had selected mares from the Hamraus to follow them, instead of horses. Bullard had told him of a plan often used on mustangs in Texas, called "running out." The hunter mounts a swift mare, gallops into a herd of mustangs, and gets in between a colt and its dam. In the fright and confusion the mother scours away, never thinking of the foal, and the innocent foal follows the strange mare, taking her for its own parent. The hunter then sheers away and lets the herd go, when the foal follows him home in perfect content, and generally becomes the pet of the hunter's wife or daughter.

The Hamraus would not leave their swords behind, although they promised not to use them. They said that there were too many bad Arabs around for them to go unarmed. Manuel had placed them in ambush behind some rock that the wild asses would have to pass. He calculated from the direction of the wind that just about the time the troop were opposite Bullard and Curtis they would scent the Hamraus. He himself waited behind a rock on the other side.

The wild troop came forward quite unsuspectingly, for they had seen nothing. As Manuel had calculated they passed the ambushed Hamraus, and just as they got close the riflemen caught scent of the others. Instantly the leader uttered a loud bray, the only ridiculous thing about him. It was answered by Manuel's mount, which kicked up a terrible row for over a minute. The poor creature was wild to get back to its companions.

That bray turned out to be a lucky stroke. In a moment more the whole troop would have been off like the wind, but the sound of a companion's voice halted them. The leader erected his long ears, and stood still, in an attitude of deep attention.

Crack! went two rifles, and the leader and another old male dropped senseless. At the same moment, out thundered the Hamraus on one side, and Manuel on the other, at full speed.

For a few minutes the wild asses pranced to and fro in confusion. Then stretching themselves out flat in their desperate haste, away they went toward the desert running the gauntlet of the Hamraus.

For a few seconds horsemen and wild asses were mixed up in a heap. Then the swifter animals drew away like the wind, and Manuel shouted with laughter. Four of the Hamraus in passing had grappled one of the young ass; one of them was hanging to her tail, another on her back, and down she came in the dust with two more hanging on her neck.

Then Manuel found himself far ahead of the toiling horses, and close in rear of the alarmed troop, gaining rapidly. The reason was plain. Every now and then the game would look back and lose distance, while the pursuer pressed on, using whip and spur. As he went he took up his first bolas, flung it, and threw down a splendid female, with a colt following her. He saw that the balls of the weapon were well tangled round her legs, and passed on, swinging the second bolas round her head. Manuel was no bungler. He was used to the bolas and lasso ever since he could toddle alone. Many were the chickens he had overthrown with a twine bolas, the puppies he lassoed with a piece of string, before he could speak plain. When he used the bolas, he was bound to hit what he aimed at. His second, third, and fourth throws were successful. Each threw down a female with a foal, and each time the foal left the troop and stayed by its dam, as he had expected.

Then Manuel spurred his charger hard, took up the coils of his lasso, and prepared for his last throw. He selected the finest male of the troop, got up within distance, and the circling noose fell with exact precision just where it was aimed.

In a moment the young gaucho had checked his steed, and was hanging back with a taut lasso, while the unlucky onagra (the proper name of the wild ass in the onagra) reared up in the air, and fell back, half strangled, on the sand.

Away went the rest of the troop as Manuel pulled up. In a flash he was off his own steed and hauling up, hand over hand, to the wild one. The onagra struggled violently to rise, but fell back exhausted, every time. The taut lasso was fast depriving it of its senses. Manuel hauled up, and found it so nearly gone, that he had no great difficulty in strapping up a foreleg, as Tom had done. Not till then did he loosen the noose of the lasso, and give the onagra breath to rise. When he did, it was just time, for it lay there panting and breathing heavily, till Manuel had remounted his own animal, when it struggled to its feet. Then the lad started back to camp, pulling the captured animal along by main force at the end of the lasso. There was not very much difficulty in this. With its foreleg tied up, the wild ass could not hang back with any great effect, and was compelled to hop along, to avoid suffocation.

As he went Manuel looked at what the Hamraus had been doing. They had performed their part of the duty with a skill and daring that showed them to be perfect horsemen. Every one of the thrown animals had an Arab upon it, who sat on its back

despite its rearings and kickings. The legs of all were perfectly free, but their mouths were all bitten. In the short space of time necessary to enable him to throw the wild ass, the Hamraus had galloped up, bridled their prizes, loosed their legs, and mounted.

He glanced ahead to the spring, and there was Jack Curtis on another wild ass, which was bounding up in the air like an India rubber ball, and trying its best to unseat Jack. But the boy seemed to be sticking to it like a leech without any effort, for he had his feet fast in the loops of Bullard's saddle; and the devil himself could not have thrown him, while he kept his feet there.

Another wild ass was also there, but it was lying extended on the ground. Manuel realized that one of the two had missed his shot, and killed his animal, as is easily done by an unskillful creaser.

"Never mind," he thought. "We each have an animal now, and we can run away from all the world when they're tamed."

So he rode on past the first Hamrau, who had just started his beast into a run, with the foal following. Manuel saw him scour away in a cloud of dust, just as the second onagra threw her Hamrau over her head by a well-executed combination of kick, jump, twirl round, and stop short, ending with a lofty kick.

But the Arab never let go of the bridle, and hung on like grim death, while the onagra pulled away at the other end. He actually succeeded in doing it, in spite of her frantic efforts, till he could pick up the bolas he had dropped when he released her. Then he let go of the bridle and brought her to the ground as she turned to run, as skillfully as Manuel himself could have done.

But it won't do to make too long a story of these wild asses. One may have too much, even of a good thing. Suffice it to say, that before a week was out there were many sore bones, among both whites and Arabs, taming these furious creatures. But they succeeded at last, what with the Rarey knee-strap and the gaucho spurs, and had seven magnificent animals, as swift as the wind, with four little foals that were quite tame, and fed among the horses, as if they had been of the same kind exactly.

Manuel had agreed to give the Hamraus all of the foals and half of the animals they themselves should tame, besides, but he was glad to trade off the other two female onagras for elephant tusks, of which the Arabs had plenty now. The boys were satisfied with their three males; and, indeed, they were the pick of the herd.

Tom Bullard was a little mortified at this hunt, for Manuel was surprised to find that his was the bullet that had killed the onagra he meant to "crease." Jack Curtis, who had aimed in fear and trembling, expecting to miss, had been the one who made the successful shot at the leader, and Jack had stuck to him well till he conquered him.

And now they all began to be anxious to try their new steeds after the swift antelope, the giraffe, and the clumsy-looking rhinoceros that had given them such an unexpected chase.

They tried racing according to time, and were amazed to find the results. All three of the male onagras could trot, at their natural pace, a measured mile, in a straight line, on the firm sand at the edge of the desert, *inside of two minutes*—in other words, as fast as many race-horses can gallop! At full speed they could pass the same distance in a little over a minute, never going much over ten or twelve seconds above that time!

Manuel moved his camp away from the desert now, and they traveled back to the dry river-bed of the Blue Nile at their old camping place, and thence moved up to the little lake near the river where they had found such glorious hunting before. The season was far advanced by this time, and the grass beginning to get scarce. Game was shy, lean and swift, and they found the benefit of their three onagras now. Horses would have given in very soon on the poor pasture in the intense heat, whereas the onagras actually grew fat. Used, as they were, to desert thorns for a dinner, the dry grass and withered bushes were a perfect feast to them.

They seemed to be able to overtake the swiftest antelope in a twinkling, and the gazelle was the only creature that gave them a hard chase.

Tom grew so proud of his swordsmanship, practicing every day, that he disdained to use a gun any more, and hunted Hamrau fashion. As for the Hamraus, they were delighted. Abou Hassan and his three brothers, as the three crack hunters of their tribe, had been assigned the female onagras to ride, in exchange for their horses; and they became more successful than ever.

And now an event happened which had a great influence on their future movements, and determined them to leave the country.

One evening, after a hard day's hunt, in which Manuel had lassoed a young giraffe, who proved so strong that he had to cut it loose, the boys were sitting at their tent door after supper, drinking the strong black coffee, without milk or sugar, universal in the east, and smoking the long pipes brought them by their dragoman Mohammed, called *chiboucks*. Sheikh Haroun and Abou Hassan were close to them, and they were looking down at the river-bed, where the pools had shrunk up, almost into mud-holes.

"When does this river fill up, Sheikh Haroun?" asked Manuel, suddenly.

"It is almost time now," replied the old sheikh. "When it comes, the rain will come with it, and the game will spread all over the country. The grass grows everywhere then, so long as to trip up the horses, and we have but little hunting till the dry season comes, which brings the game back to the place where the water runs. When the river comes

we must live on our flocks, like other Arabs, and rest our horses."

"And how long does the river take to rise?" asked Manuel.

"As long as a man can count twenty," said Sheikh Haroun, gravely. "It comes like a thief in the night, and woe be to those caught in its path."

As he spoke they could hear a faint, distant murmur, like the growl of far-off thunder, but gradually rising. Sheikh Haroun lifted his hand in attention, and observed:

"The time has come; the river is nigh us. In a little while you shall see it pass."

The distant murmur increased to a low roar, like the sound of a great waterfall, crashing and thundering into an abyss. The animals in camp began to be uneasy and fidget about their tethers, and the Arabs ran to secure them. Manuel ordered double hobbles to be put on the precious onagras, behind and before, that nothing might admit of their escape, and then he, Bullard and Curtis stood on the bank waiting for the river, if the approaching noise was really the river.

Below them was the great river-bed, with banks at least a hundred feet high, sloping down, dry and yellow, on either side. The pools in the bed had shrunk away, and the hippopotami had left them for higher places nearer the source of the river.

The dry bed was at least half a mile across. Could it be possible to fill it so quickly as the Arab had said? The thundering noise coming nearer every moment promised to tell them.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RIVER.

"Here it comes!" said Tom Bullard, in a low voice of awe. "Heavens! what a wave!"

The boys looked round. The roar had now become deafening.

Far up the river they saw a huge wall of white foam, coming down as fast as a locomotive on an express train, filling the river from side to side. The wall was quite a hundred feet high, and came whizzing on, with the sound of mighty thunder. It was over a mile off, but it reached them in less than a minute, the noise becoming louder and louder as it came. The animals in camp were plunging and struggling, men running about and shouting, but the roar of the water drowned every other sound. Then with a rush, faster than a galloping horse, the mighty wave swept past them, and went tearing down the river-bed. Behind it was a dark torrent, full of fallen trees shooting past, tumbling one over the other in wild confusion under the still starlight. Where a great chasm had existed before, now was a full rushing river; and they could hear the great wave roaring onward on its destructive course, miles away, crashing and tearing along, the sound sinking into a distant murmur at last, while the river became calm, and they could only tell how rapidly it was going by watching the great logs, that from time to time shot past, with lightning velocity.

The great river Atbara was up, and the rains had come on the mountains of Abyssinia, swelling it so suddenly from a thousand rivulets.

"And in a few days more," said Manuel, thoughtfully, "the Nile will rise, from Khartoum to Alexandria, and the black mud that has traveled all the way from the equator will settle on the fields of Egypt till all the land will rejoice. Fellows, it is time we were off. We have seen enough of this country."

They very soon found that Manuel was right. As Sheikh Haroun had predicted, the rising of the river was soon followed by the rains, which were nothing but tremendous torrents, that penetrated the tents as if they had been sieves. Our travelers were very glad to load up and travel away from the region of rain into the lower plains. It took them several days' rapid marching, in which they were accompanied by the Hamraus, both parties camping and hunting together. The face of the country had undergone a change, as if by magic. Before, everything had been parched and withered, the grass burnt up, the trees dry and brown, not a sign of game anywhere, except close to the river. Now the fresh young grass was shooting up in all directions, antelopes of fifty different kinds were scattered here and there, and the graceful heads of the giraffes could be seen in clusters by the tall mimosa. The elephants had retired to the deeper forests, but rhinoceroses were plenty, and lions seemed to be even more numerous. Every thicket seemed to hold one, lying asleep by the half-devoured body of some game slain the night before; and the sight grew so common that our boys ceased to fire at them, after they had collected eight lion skins in the first morning. The river was full of hippopotami, rejoicing in plenty; and all nature had undergone a grateful change.

But after about three days' march, they began to get out of the influence of the rainy season, as they approached Khartoum. Here they were once more at the edge of the desert, and everything was scorched and barren, away from the river bank. They encamped near the town, and the governor of Khartoum, hearing they were there, came out to welcome them back. The governor was wonderfully polite to the Hamraus. He had often heard of their tribe, and was very anxious to cultivate their friendship, as the viceroy of Egypt wished to extend his dominions further south, and the good offices of a powerful tribe like the Hamraus would be very useful.

A grand reception was accordingly held, in front of Manuel's tent, the distinguished American strangers being the entertainers of all parties.

Sheikh Haroun, clothed in a long robe of crimson silk presented him by the governor, whose name was Achmet Pasha, was smoking a long chibouque, or Turkish pipe; the pasha, in a magnificent uni-

form, flashing all over with gold lace, sat between the sheikh and Manuel; Abou Hassan and Abdallah, with others of the principal Arabs, were seated cross-legged, with Curtis and Bullard, smoking and chatting.

The conversation soon turned on the tribes to the south and west of them, and on the mysterious White Nile, which came from no one knew where. Manuel had heard of the discovery of the great lake Nyanza, which had been assumed as its source, and a keen desire began to possess his mind to find out for himself the great problem, and to go where no one else had been. He felt certain that if there was a lake, such as described by Speke and Baker, there must also be some river flowing into that lake, if not many such rivers. The largest of these would then be the true source of the Nile.

The conversation turned on it in this wise:

MANUEL. "Can any here tell whence comes the great Bahr el Abiad? (The White Nile.) The Atbara we know, but whence is the Bahr el Abiad?"

SHEIKH HAROUN. "No one can fathom the decrees of Allah. It comes from the south, among a people that have eyes in their stomachs, and others with dogs' heads on their shoulders.* We know no more."

MANUEL. "Cannot the pasha tell us more? Surely he knows of the English traveler that went by there but a year or two ago, and came back, saying he had found the source of the Nile."

PASHA. "The American effendi (gentleman) is right. Such a man came by, a tall man, as strong as a buffalo, with a beard like the lion's mane. He had a lady with him, and went to the south. He came back safe once. His highness the khedive has sent him off again, and no one has heard of him since he reached Gondokoro."

Manuel recognized in this description the celebrated traveler, Sir Samuel Baker, a man of great size and strength, who had not been heard of for some time. He asked, therefore:

"Suppose I go with my friends here to look after this traveler—can you furnish us with guides, my lord the pasha?"

PASHA. "I can give you guides as far as Khordofan. There you will have to find others."

SHEIKH HAROUN. "Beware, my son, of going among those accursed people with the dogs' heads. They will devour you, of a surety."

MANUEL (smiling). "My father is too cautious. Before I left home, I promised my kinsmen that I would go where no one else had ever been. Now this traveler has plainly been up the Bahr el Abiad; therefore I will go to the westward and south, where no one has been."

SHEIKH HAROUN. "You will never get there, my son. There is a powerful and mighty prince there, who lives many moons' journey to the south-west, who kills all strangers, and whose people ride on elephants. No one has ever succeeded in reaching there, and come back to tell of it."

MANUEL. "Then there will I go, and come back the first. How know you that the people ride on elephants if no one has ever come back to tell of it?"

SHEIKH HAROUN. "People have been to the borders of the river that separates this kingdom from the rest of the world, and have seen the terrible strangers across the river, on their elephants. They live in palaces, such as the giants once built along the great river to the north."

Manuel began to be greatly interested. He had known that there were vague traditions in all parts of Africa, about a people somewhere in the interior "who rode on elephants." Here the same tradition again met him from the mouth of the old Arab chief, who was very cautious of his words.

"Which of you will go along with me?" he continued. "I will reward him handsomely when I come back, and make his tribe rich."

"I will go with my white brother," said Abou Hassan, suddenly. "He has been good to me and mine, and I will accompany him to death."

"And so will I," joined in Selim and Abdallah.

"It is well!" said Manuel. "My Arab brothers shall be well treated. When will the pasha give us a guide to Khordofan?"

PASHA. "Whenever their American excellencies please. However, I would not advise their trying to find the hidden country. No one has gone there within my lifetime, and there are only doubtful stories of people who went there many years ago. Their excellencies cannot always believe such stories. There is such a country, but it may be too far off to be reached."

MANUEL. "Wherever it be, I am going to find it. I will go where no one else has been before me, and find out if there be really such a people as they say lives there."

PASHA (politely). "Allah be with your undertaking. You shall have all the help I can give you."

And accordingly, the next few days were consumed in preparations for the march into the unknown regions. The Egyptian servants were all dismissed, and desert Arabs hired, with their camels, to convey the baggage of our travelers. Abou Hassan and his Hamraus here proved invaluable. The lads knew that they could be depended on if it came to a fight, which was very possible where they were going, and the Hamraus took care to pick out men that they knew, from the numerous Arabs offering their services, for camel-drivers, grooms, etc.

When the party was finally made up, to cross the desert to Khordofan, it was sufficiently formidable to resist any ordinary attack. Abou Hassan and his two brothers were a host in themselves, and had persuaded three other Hamraus to join them. Manuel had given them all long Turkish muskets, which

are quite cheap at Khartoum, with which the Arabs were delighted. All of his camel-drivers and servants were armed in the same manner, and he and his two friends were furnished with breech-loaders and revolvers.

Their little caravan was compact and carefully loaded, composed of thirty camels, all told. The Hamraus and the Arab grooms were all mounted on good horses, and our three friends had the best mounts of all, the incomparable, swift, tireless onagers.

"Ho! for the hidden land!" cried Jack Curtis, gayly, as they bounded out of the gate of Khartoum, ahead of their caravan. "Who says we won't reach it?"

"No one," responded "Plug." "They hain't had any Yanks in this vicinity for a long time. We'll show them the way to do it."

And the caravan passed out on the west bank of the Nile, and struck into the dreary Lybian desert.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HIDDEN PEOPLE.

The low, mud walls of the city of Khordofan rose from the midst of a broad plain, now covered with short grass in the freshness of the rainy season. Flocks and herds of sheep, goats and camels, covered the plain as far as the eye could see, all moving to the north, to escape the advancing rains, and following returning verdure. Through the midst of these herds the caravan of our travelers pushed its way to the great gate of the city, passing groups of wild desert Arabs, on horses and camels, driving their herds to the north. Abou Hassan told Curtis that all the tribes of the Lybian desert, migrated in this way from south to north, and back again, to follow the pasturage at different times of the year.

Inside the town they found long, narrow streets, winding here and there, low huts, built of mud and thatched with millet-straw, and a great bare marketplace in the center of the city, where the merchants went into camp with their caravans, and trafficked in ivory and gold-dust, ostrich-feathers and palm-oil, and slaves from the interior.

Our friends were very much interested in everything they saw. There were caravans there from all over the recesses of Central Africa, merchants from Bornou, with jetty faces and enormous turbans, that seemed as if three ordinary blankets were rolled into each; tall, muscular negroes from Kooka and Kanem, and the countries that border Lake Tchad, and one little party of merchants from the Shoa tribe of Arabs, that dwell on the Shary river.

These were the most interesting of all to our travelers. They came from that mysterious region where no white man had yet been; and beyond them, by common tradition, lay the country of the "elephant-riders." Manuel at once opened communication with these Arab merchants, and began to question them about this mysterious country. He invited them to a feast at his caravanserai that evening, and the Shoa merchants came. A caravanserai is the substitute, in Mohammedan countries, for our hotels. It consists of a vast open court, surrounded with buildings, which are divided into little bare stone cells. This is all the accommodation given, but it is enough in that climate, and it costs about a cent a day. Provisions and fuel have to be procured at the market, and every traveler brings his own bed, which is but a piece of carpet, or a mat and a cloak.

Here, on the evening of their arrival in Khordofan, our travelers were seated, in the court of the caravanserai, with the Shoa merchants and the Hamraus chiefs, smoking their long chibouques and drinking coffee out of tiny cups, while the unloaded camels knelt all round them.

The Shoa merchants were very unlike the negroes. Their complexion was a light copper-color, and they had heavy beards, their faces were regularly aquiline, and they were fine-looking men. Their hair, however, was frizzed in a very curious manner, standing out nearly a foot from the heads of its wearers, which were without any other covering. The Shoa wore long robes, and carried clumsy cimeters with them, but no firearms.

After many compliments passing, Manuel opened the conversation concerning the country he longed to hear about.

MANUEL. "We are going to travel toward your country, very soon. We have heard of the valor and worth of the Shoa from afar, and have resolved to come and see them."

SHOA MERCHANT. "My lord will be very welcome. We have but a little, but that little all belongs to my lord."

MANUEL. "Your tribe feed their flocks on the banks of the Shary—is it not so—to the south of the Lake Tchad?"

SHOA. "We do. The sultan of Bornou makes us pay tribute, but he protects us from our enemies."

MANUEL. "And what people lie again to the south of you?"

SHOA. "The black people of the little mountains. They are robbers, but they have no arms, and live in caves."

MANUEL. "How can they rob, if they have no arms?"

SHOA. "They have nothing but knives, and they creep into our camps at night, and stab us asleep. But if a good watch is kept, there is no danger."

MANUEL. "And how do these people live?"

SHOA. "They run down the young buffaloes, when they catch them alone, and stab them. They are as swift as horses."

MANUEL. "You interest me greatly. And what people lies beyond them again?"

SHOA. "Beyond them lie the great mountains, whose tops reach heaven, covered with eternal snow. There is but one pass through these moun-

* This is a common Arab superstition.

tains, and on the other side lies the great river of the south, that flows through the country of the white people."

MANUEL (much interested.) "The country of the white people? What white people?"

SHOA. "We cannot tell. No one has ever been there and come back. They ride on elephants, and live in palaces, but they will let no one cross the river to see their country. They live alone."

MANUEL. "I have heard of these people, before. Tell us what you know about them. Have they guns as we have?"

SHOA. "We cannot tell. We think not. No one has ever been through the dark pass to see, since our grandfathers were children."

MANUEL. "Did any one ever go, then?"

SHOA. "My grandfather has told me that he once saw a man who had been among them, and who escaped. He said that they made him a slave, and put him to work on a temple, where the columns were so big, that twenty men, with joined hands, could only just girdle them. That they had rows of statues miles long, of lions with women's heads, and elephants with castles on their backs; and that their armies marched to the sound of music, with swords and spears and shields. But who can tell if it be true or not?"

MANUEL. "Will you guide me to this country?"

SHOA (astonished). "Nay; it were tempting Allah to do it. They will kill us all."

MANUEL. "Will you guide me to your own country, then?"

SHOA. "Most surely we will, and be much honored to see the great strangers from over the sea. We are going to leave here, and go back, in three days."

MANUEL. "By that time we will be ready. God be with you."

SHOA. "The blessings of Allah be on your lordship. We will retire, for it grows late."

And the little party broke up, with profound bows on both sides, when Manuel and his friends proceeded to discuss the news, in their own language.

The tidings of a wonderful people that lived in the very heart of Africa, sufficiently advanced in civilization to have tamed the elephant, were growing more certain at every step. Whether they had guns or not, seemed to be doubtful, as also the situation of the country. It was in the midst of that bare spot on the map of Africa, still denominated the *Unexplored Region*, and fancy was at liberty to clothe the picture in any colors that suited the taste.

"What could he mean by 'rows of statues a mile long, of lions with women's faces'?" asked Curtis, suddenly. "The people can't be Egyptians, can they? How could they get there?"

MANUEL. "I have a theory on that point, Jack, which this may perhaps confirm. I have seen, in Herodotus, a passage, saying, that Psammetichus, the last Egyptian king, who was driven out by Cambyses of Persia, took an army of four hundred thousand men, and marched off up the Nile into the interior. He was never heard of again, he nor his army. I have always thought that some portion of that army must have founded a colony somewhere in the interior, and perpetuated Egyptian civilization. It may be possible that these are the descendants of that Egyptian army, who have kept themselves isolated from the world, like the Chinese, to preserve their nationality. It is certain that Dr. Livingstone traces a great likeness in the Makalolo and other southern tribes, to the Egyptian sculptures. These strange people have probably mixed with the negroes of the south at some time, while keeping their main race pure in their own country. But we shall see when we get there. Are you all willing to take the risk?"

BULLARD. "Ay, my boy! We'll follow you anywhere you please. Life's short. Let's see all we can. Hooroor for the Egyptians!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BLACK HILLS.

In a few weeks after the above conversation, a small, well-appointed caravan was wending its way through a most delightful country by the banks of a lovely little stream, the head-waters of the Shary. Around them lay rolling green meadows, spangled with thousands of flowers, and little park-like clumps of noble trees were scattered here and there, all over the face of the country, which fell away in a series of rolling terraces to the north, where the white glistening of water showed the existence of Lake Tchad. To the south it continued to rise by slow degrees, to where a distant blue line of hills barred the prospect. And beyond these again, cutting the blue sky sharply, were three white peaks, that glittered in the sun under their mantles of ice and snow.

"Those are the Snow Mountains," said Ibu Ayoud, the Shoa merchant, gravely. "Beyond there lies the hidden country of the Elephant-Riders, and those hills hold the black robbers I told you of. We will go with you to the foot of them, but nothing would tempt us beyond there."

Manuel Garcia turned and looked proudly back over his well-appointed cavalcade. There were at least twenty well armed men, who could be depended on to the last gasp, who all bore muskets. Manuel had also unpacked a case of revolvers, and distributed them to his six Hamraus, whom he knew to be the best soldiers of all, in point of courage.

"Think you that all the elephants of the hidden country can frighten us?" he asked, laughing. "Nay, but see how easy it is to kill them. I will show you."

As he spoke, he galloped off, on his swift onagra, between two of the park-like clumps of trees, to-

ward a herd of elephants, quietly feeding not a quarter of a mile off. One of the most pleasing features of the country, indeed, was the surprising quantity and tameness of the game. Elephants and giraffes, usually so timid, seemed to have no fear here, and browsed as if they never were in the habit of being hunted. The poorly-armed negroes and Arabs, unprovided with fire-arms in most cases, were afraid to tackle these elephants, who came and broke their fences, and trampled down their rice fields without mercy. Manuel had no difficulty in riding up alongside of the finest pair of tusks in the party, and plugging a shell into him at a few feet' distance. The huge beast staggered and swayed, fell on its knees, and finally on its side, stone dead, while the rest of the herd, panic-stricken, dashed off, trumpeting shrilly, leaving the field to Manuel, who had slain their leader with the deadly percussion shell.

The little caravan pursued its march, and came up to Manuel, when the young man pointed to the long white tusks, and said, briefly:

"Cut them out, Selim, and load them on a camel.

The Elephant-Riders will fare no better when they see us. If they try to hurt us. Now, Ibu Ayoud, will you guide us to the pass in the mountains?"

"Indeed I dare not," said Ibu Ayoud. "There are but few of us have ever been further than here, and I only know of one path through the Black Hills, which you can find without a guide, for it is quite plain. Beyond that we dare not go. The hidden people might attack us at any moment."

"Very well, then," said Manuel, good-naturedly; "we will not ask you to go any further. We can find our own way, I suppose. Will you go now from us? I press forward."

"Then we go back," said Ibu Ayoud, mournfully. "Oh, noble strangers! do not tempt Allah thus, by rushing against certain death. No one ever came back who went on that track."

"Then we shall be the first," said Manuel, cheerfully. "Farewell, Ibu Ayoud. Succ^s attend you in all your undertakings, and may we soon meet again, and tell over our stories of the hidden people."

"I shall never see you again," quoth Ibu Ayoud, sorrowfully. And then the white travelers' cavalcade separated from the Shoa merchants, and rode straight on toward the Black Hills.

"Now at last I am obeying my poor father's will," said Manuel to Jack, as he rode on, "and now at last I am where no white man has ever been before me. Deuham and Clapperton, fifty years ago, and Barth, twenty, only came as far as that lake we have left in our rear. And now to see if the stories we have heard are true."

"Don't believe 'em," cried Tom Bullard, gruffly. "These niggers get scared about nothing. Because these people scare them, they think every one else is afraid. We'll show them! These Hamraus are the only gritty fellows I've seen in all Africa. Won't we make the niggers hum, if they come any of their dildos over us?"

Jack Curtis looked grave and thoughtful.

"I'm thinking," he said, "that if they are such a people as they say, with large armies and riding on elephants, we shall be nowhere. Our little twenty or thirty men will stand no chance against them."

"If you're afraid, we'll go back, Jack," said Manuel. "No one shall say I forced him against his will into danger."

"Nay, you mistake," answered Jack; "I am as eager to go as you are, but I want you to remember that we must keep a strict watch and ward now, for we are running into danger."

"I am glad you say so," confessed Manuel. "We must divide our men into three watches every night now, and put sentries all round the camp, with loaded guns. You, Jack, shall take the first watch, Tom shall take the second, and I will take the third, that ends in the morning. That is the time of most danger. The Hamraus shall be put with us, two and two, and all the men shall sleep on their arms, ready for an alarm."

Having thus determined, they kept on their onward course, the country rising all the while toward the mysterious Black Hills of which they had heard so much. The elevation had increased so rapidly, that the air was sensibly cooler, and forests of walnut and elm, covered with wild vines, began to replace the palms and tropical baobabs and teaks of the lowland's around Lake Tchad.

As they looked back over the country they had passed, they could see the faint white line of the lake many miles away, but it was too far off to be plain; and as they entered the forest, they soon lost sight of all that looked like anything that had been visited before. Here, in the heart of Africa, to the Equator, to be riding through the open woods of a temperate climate, such as France or Italy might boast, was a fact too bewildering to become familiar at once.

The woods into which they had entered were very open and cheerful. The trees stood at long distances apart, and spread out their long branches in all directions. Many of them supported vines, now loaded with luscious bunches of wild grapes, which the Arabs plucked and ate as they went along. Every one felt the bracing influence of the cooler temperature and the pleasant scenery around them. The terrible stories they had heard had made them so gloomy, that the reaction of finding the reality so pleasant elated them to high spirits. The woods became more and more open as they advanced, and they finally emerged on a lofty plateau, at the further extremity of which, not more than ten miles off, rose the Black Hills.

The plateau was even more park-like than anything in the lower country. The ground was covered with short, green grass, as level as a bowling-green,

interspersed with clumps of magnificent oaks; and herds of spotted fallow deer had replaced the antelopes of the lower plains. It was a complete change from the tropic to the temperate zone; and the hills beyond, bare of trees, and covered with dark purple heath, showed that the climate was even cooler there.

"It is just like Mexico," exclaimed Manuel. "Here we are in the temperate zone, and we look down to the torrid, and up to the frigid, within a day's journey. Hallo, Tom! what's the matter?"

Without making any answer, Tom suddenly shook his rein, and darted away on his onagra, at the top of his speed, straight across the smooth grass, among the herds of deer, as swift as a falcon on the wing. As he went, Manuel looked ahead to see what had sent him off at such a rate. He beheld three or four black human figures in the distance, running with immense speed toward the hills—such speed, that a horseman would have been puzzled to catch up with them. But Tom was mounted on a creature that could go almost a mile in a minute, and he came rapidly up with the flying creatures.

"Take charge here, Curtis," said Manuel, hastily. "I'm off to help Tom."

And Manuel shot away on the track as fast as he could urge his own onagra, unslinging the lasso that hung from his saddle-bow, as he did so. The three ladies had retained their tough, serviceable parchment saddles, with strong ox-hide cinches, or girths, and plaited leather lassoes. They had found them better than anything else for such hard work as they had had. Manuel saw Tom come up with one of the escaping men, a tall, long-legged fellow, as black as jet, who seemed to run as fresh as ever. The Texan whirled his lasso round his head with a shout, and the next minute sent the black noose flying through the air till it hovered over the head of the fugitive. It fell, and the poor fellow was plucked off his feet, with a howl of terror, and sent rolling over on the grass, while Manuel passed on after the rest. He saw two others running neck and neck, and made a successful cast of his lasso, catching both together, and plucking them off their feet. Then he turned and looked round at Tom. The Texan sat on his horse, looking at his captive, who knelt on the ground with his hands clasped, as if imploring mercy, and then it suddenly occurred to both that they did not understand a word of the negro's language, so that their captives were likely to prove useless, after all.

In some perplexity they awaited the arrival of Abou Hassan, who was the first to come up. The Hamraus looked at the captives with some contempt, and ejaculated:

"Base. Live in holes. Same in my country. Wah-lah! They are but dogs. Let us kill them."

"Not so," said Manuel. "Do you know their language?"

"No," Abou Hassan responded scornfully. "I do not talk to dogs. I have a slave here—a base dog like them. He can speak to them."

"Good news," said Manuel. "Bring him quick. We must get news of the country beyond."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BABOOLAS.

The Base slave came forward, a tall, vigorous boy enough, to be sure, but black as jet, with a stupid, animal face. On comparing him with the captives, it became evident that they were of the same race. The three men caught in the lassoes were all very tall, over six feet high in fact, with frames the very models of lightness and strength combined. They had been chased at full speed for nearly half a mile, and hardly appeared to be breathless, although quite overcome with terror. They were entirely destitute of clothes, and their only appearance of weapons was that each carried, stuck in his thick, matted wool, a sort of short knife, made of flint, clumsy in the extreme, being merely a sharp wedge split off a rock.

They evidently expected instant death, for their faces expressed extreme terror. Manuel called the Base boy forward and addressed him in Arabic, bidding him tell them not to be afraid, that they would not be hurt by the strangers, and to ask them if they could guide the travelers to the country of the Elephant Riders.

The boy at once addressed the kneeling men in his own language, and the travelers could see that he was partially understood by the savages. Manuel bid him ask what they called themselves, and one of them answered at once, grinning and tapping himself:

"Baboola! Baboola!"

"More like a baboon," growled Tom Bullard. "Good name for the cusses. Ask Mr. Baboola how far we are from the country of the Elephant Riders?"

The Base boy asked, but declared he could not understand the answer.

The Baboola language was like his own, but not quite the same. They were compelled, therefore, to trust to the language of signs to help them out, and by these they made out that it would take two days to cross the hills, and arrive at the pass through the mountains which they had heard of. The Baboola made signs that the pass lay between the two tallest peaks, and that on the other side was a great river running to the east. Manuel then caused them to be released, and presented each with a long knife, which he took from the stores. This won the confidence of the Baboolas entirely. They seemed to realize that their captors meant them no harm, and became communicative at once. It was then discovered, for the first time, that one of them could speak a little broken Arabic, which he explained by saying that he had been a slave among the Shoa in former times.

It was now easy enough to converse, and Manuel quested on the Babools closely about his tribe and their locality, and about the mysterious Elephant Riders. He found that the prejudices of the Shoa had made a formidable people out of a tribe as harmless as the "diggers" of the Rocky Mountains, in the persons of the Babools themselves.

"How could we stab people asleep?" asked the Baboola, "when all our stone knives can hardly skin a deer? We have crept into their camp sometimes, and stolen steel knives from them, but it was only from their parties of slave-hunters, who came after us to steal slaves. We are swift of foot, but it is only from fleeing from our enemies."

Manuel assured them that he was not after slaves, but to find the country of the Elephant Riders.

"Do they ever cross the river to your side?" he asked.

"No," the Baboola told them; "they kept on their own side of the river, where there was a great city. There were plenty of boats on the river, but no one ever crossed to their side, except to anchor and fish."

Manuel asked if any one understood their language, or had heard them speak, and the Baboola said that there was one man who had been a slave among them who did.

"How did he come to be a slave there?" asked Manuel. "Do they also come over here slave-hunting?"

"No, no," said the Baboola. "They leave us alone. But one of our men who was very bold, thought he would swim over the river in the night, and try to steal some of their sheep, which are very tame. And they caught him, and made a slave of him in the great temple of their god Ozireez, and he was there four years before he made his escape."

Manuel turned to Jack with an animated face.

"I was right," he said. "Who can this god Ozireez be, but Osiris, the Egyptian Sun-God? Quick, tell me, Baboola, how did your friend get away? Was he not better off in that magnificent temple than in your rocks and caves?"

"Liberty is sweet, my lord," replied the Baboola. "They gave him to eat and drink, but he had to work, and a Baboola hates work."

"Now listen," said Manuel. "Go and find this man if you can, and bring him to me, and come back yourself, and I will make you both happy. You shall have plenty to eat, fine clothes, and a knife apiece, and I will not make you work. All I want you to do is to tell me what these people say when I go to see them."

But the Baboola was frightened at the bare idea of going among the mysterious Elephant Riders. He protested that he dared not, that the whole party would be made slaves of, that the Elephant Riders were more numerous than the leaves of the forest, etc., etc.

"Well, then," said Manuel, "they cannot hurt us, for we carry thunder and lightning in these tubes. If your people have fears, we will show them that we can put to flight all the armies of the Elephant Riders. All we want is a guide, and one to speak for us. You cannot keep those knives until you have brought us the man who was a slave. I have spoken. Go."

This altered the faces of the poor Babools. They looked wistfully at the coveted knives, and at length one of them volunteered to go for the man who had been a slave, if they would let him take his knife, and leave the other two behind. Manuel consented to this, and went forward with the caravan to the foot of the Black Hills, where he went into camp by a little opening, in a grove of oak and beech trees.

The caravan was made into a square, and two sentries were put on each face, with loaded muskets, to guard against treachery from the Babools. The two hostages were kept under guard in the middle of the camp, and the fires were kindled for supper. Toward sunset the absent Baboola returned with the desired individual, who proved to be a reckless, dare-devil-looking fellow, bearing a short javelin, the staff made of ebony inlaid with ivory in beautiful patterns, the head composed of a very hard, shining bronze, that took a keen edge.

Manuel examined the weapon with great curiosity, when he learned that it had been stolen by the Baboola from the temple of Ozireez. The artistic excellence of the work was far ahead of anything that he had seen on Egyptian monuments, the drawing of the figures (which were elephants led by men in procession) equal to that of a Greek bas-relief. It was evident that the Egyptian colony had made some advances in art, in the lapse of centuries, and their new position.

Manuel made much of this adventurous Baboola, who held communication in a roundabout way with him through his comrade, who understood Arabic. He had none of the latter's fears, and dressed himself willing to guide the party across the river.

"You'll never get across it alive," he said, laughing. "The men of the south have a town close to there, and they can march an army down to the river in half a day, that will eat you up. But I will show you the pass. They treated me kindly enough, though I was their slave."

"Have they any guns?" inquired Manuel, curious to find if Sheik Haroun was right.

"No," said the Baboola. "They have wonderful machines that cast great stones, and they have bows and arrows and spears, but none of the fire weapons that come from the north. They had some once, so the priests told me, which they took from the Felatabs, who attacked them; but that is long ago, and the captured weapons were hung up in the temples, for no man knew how to use them."

The travelers were never weary of asking ques-

tions of the quick-witted Baboola, who seemed to have lost all the timidity and lumpish look of the others, from his intercourse with the hidden people. They learned how the people had elephants in common employment throughout the country, to plow the fields, drag and carry stone for buildings, and to serve in the army; that their only dreaded enemies were the Felatabs of the south, who had guns, and made forays on them, but that they had always beaten them off by superior discipline.

The early part of the night passed in hearing the wonderful tales, and it was from a mingled dream of the splendors of the hidden people, that Manuel was roused by Curtis to take his morning watch.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ELEPHANT RIDERS.

THREE days after this, the caravan of the Sword Hunters and their American allies entered a tremendous pass between the two lofty peaks of the Snow Mountains. The scene around them was indescribably grand. Behind them lay the dark, rolling waves of the Black Hills, safely passed, and on each side of them towered a perpendicular wall of rock, shutting in the passage exactly like the canyons of America. Above them, the mountains towed away on either side, into regions of eternal snow, and the conical shape of one of them announced that it was an extinct volcano.

The pass was about a quarter of a mile in breadth, and through the center of it ran a cool rippling stream, bordered with very scanty, pale-tinted grass, for the walls of rock shot up so high, that even the breadth of the pass did not admit a full glare of sunlight and the pale, sickly vegetation showed the effects of want of light.

The caravan was gathered into military order, marching along by the bank of the stream. In front rode Manuel and the six Hamraus, three of whom were mounted on the female onagras. All were armed with revolvers, and bore their razor-like swords, ready for use. The camel-drivers, with their muskets on their shoulders, trudged on either flank beside their camels, under command of Jack Curtis. Bullard brought up the rear, with a rabble of naked Babools, who had accompanied them from curiosity and greed, having heard wonderful stories of the power of the white men's rifles to slay elephants, and so procure abundance of food.

They were now almost within sight of the "hidden country," and every heart beat high at the thought, that around the next curve in the pass the view of that wondrous land would burst on them.

Manuel could no longer restrain his impatience. He darted off at full speed, till the blue sky began to show through the gap, and then pulled up at the edge of an abrupt descent, lost in wonder.

The scene was all, and more than he expected. Below him, at a distance of some two thousand feet, a broad, beautiful river wound its way along by the foot of the mountain range on a spur of which he stood, and then meandered off toward the east, through a rolling plain, dotted with white villages and parcelled into fields, where the usual luxuriance of tropical vegetation seemed to have been pruned and trained down with a picture of perfect luxury. A network of white roads intersected the country, and every little eminence seemed to boast of a lordly mansion.

On the other side of the river, down to whose very banks it stretched, stood a large city, with broad, paved streets and numerous white temples; and from his lofty elevation Manuel could count five more cities, in different directions.

Eagerly he unslung his telescope, and examined them, to see if his conjecture as to the architecture was correct. But no. It was not Egyptian in style. There was a grace and finish about it worthy of the best periods of Greek art, with all the massive solidity of the old monuments of Memphis and Thebes. And there were other features about it resembling the Hindoo, notably so the introduction of carved elephants in many places to support the roofs instead of columns. The roofs themselves were flat, and appeared to be used as promenades, while bridges seemed to be thrown from house-top to house-top over the principal streets.

But the thing that most excited the gazer's attention was the presence of a large body of elephants, who appeared to be under perfect military training, and were going through their exercise on a great open field by the city on the river. They were all loaded with armed men, whose weapons glittered in the sun, and seemed to be divided into parties of ten, which formed columns, and wheeled into lines with great precision. When Manuel saw the troops of obedient creatures, so powerful and grand, and counted fifty separate troops of ten, for the first time his heart seemed to fail him, as he thought over his puny means of resistance to such a powerful body of men and animals, should they refuse him admittance.

And yet he was determined to persevere. The very grandeur of everything only made him more set to discover what really lay in this hitherto unknown country. He had come so far, and had seen the hidden country from the mountains; and now he was determined to press forward.

As he sat on his onagra, gazing at the scene below, Abou Hassan rode up alongside and uttered an exclamation of wonder.

"Allah Kerim!" he cried; "it is true, after all. The people that ride on elephants are there, and we have seen them."

"Will you dare to go forward with me then?" asked Manuel. "Do you not fear such a great people?"

"I fear nothing that my white brother fears not," said the Arab, proudly. "The hidden people have elephants, but we have swords and guns. I will

ride on with my white brother. After all, they may not be so bad as they are called. The Babools were called robbers, and they are but beggars."

Manuel felt reassured at the confident tone of the Arab, and the whole caravan was soon up and halted in the pass, gazing down at the wonderful sight below. It was a most picturesque scene, from both points of view, the gayly-clothed Arabs, and the loaded camels with their brightly-striped housings, the glittering arms of the horsemen in the pass on one, and below them the serried squadrons of elephants moving in order by the walls of the mysterious white city.

The pass ended where they were, and the road was nothing but a steep incline of bare rock, made very slippery and dangerous in the middle by the little stream which trickled over its face, and formed green carpets of moss along its course as it spread out.

It became evident that all their further progress must be made in full view of the people of the "hidden country." The descent was at least two thousand feet perpendicularly, and lay at an angle of not more than forty-five degrees straight down. But a narrow path appeared to have been cut in former times, just sufficient to admit of the camels going single file, which ran zig-zag across the face of the rock, and into this path Manuel rode boldly, calling to his men to follow.

Before the caravan had half-emerged from the pass it was perceived from below.

Manuel saw the great regiment of elephants cease its evolutions. Then came the distant note of a trumpet, remarkably deep and sonorous, which sounded a long complicated signal. The elephants broke into a long column, marched solemnly down to the river, and drew up in a line along the bank, while a horseman who had been hovering among the troop unperceived, went off at full speed to the city.

That city itself appeared to be aroused as if by magic at the news. The white housetops became black with people in a few minutes, and all eyes appeared to be turned on the venturesome caravan, which quietly pursued its way meanwhile down the face of the rock.

Still the Sword Hunters kept on; and presently, out of the gate of the city, which was walled, trotted a narrow stream of horsemen, who glittered from head to foot in bright, brazen armor. The stream grew broader, and the men galloped out, forming squadrons a hundred broad, with as much regularity as any civilized horsemen Manuel had seen. They all bore long lances, and looked sufficiently formidable, as they moved in straight, unbroken lines.

"Hello! here comes the mud-mashers!" cried Tom Bullard, as out of a second gate, near the water, issued a glittering column of infantry, with spears and huge shields and helmets. "Golly, fellows! They're turning out the whole empire to keep us out. What'll we do?"

"Keep on," said Curtis, carelessly. "Now we're in for it; let's see what those fellows are made of. They've no guns."

"What do you call those?" interrupted Bullard, pointing to the field below.

As he spoke, the columns of horse and foot appeared to be ended; and out of the first gate came, at a slinging trot, a long file of camels, each of which bore on its back a strange-looking machine, which appeared to be nothing more than a gigantic crossbow, the bow being from ten to twenty feet in length. Each camel carried a rider, and was accompanied by a horseman in armor.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Curtis; "here's antiquity with a vengeance. It reminds me of old Wolcott and his lessons in Polybius at school. What are they going to do with those machines?"

"Shoot us, I suppose," answered Bullard, coolly. "Wish 'em joy. I guess we could pick 'em all off from here, without stirring another peg."

Manuel said not a word. He rode on ahead, revolving plans of entering the "hidden country" without fighting, if possible, considering the enormous odds against any such attempt.

"Oh! for a single piece of artillery!" he mentally cried. "We could put them all to flight in a single minute if we could drop a shell in among them. But we have none, so we must do the best we can."

By the time the caravan had reached the foot of the mountain, there was a force of several thousand men accumulated on the other side of the river, waiting in silence the advent of the strangers. The stream was about three hundred yards broad here, and there were many boats on the other side. Manuel halted his party on the river bank, bid them bring their weapons to bear on the men with the camels, whom he feared most, and went down himself, accompanied by the two Babools, whom he had retained for interpreters, to hail the enemy.

Appearances were decided menacing when he arrived. A long row of kneeling camels was opposite, and on their backs were the huge cross-bows, bent, with arrows about eight feet long leveled at him and his party. Obviously the enemy must have confidence in their cross-bows carrying all that distance, so that missile weapons were about on an equality.

Manuel held up his open hand, with the palm toward the strangers, as if to show them that he was unarmed. Then he sounded a long call on a bugle which he always carried by his side, and beckoned, as if to invite a parley.

There was a slight stir among the strangers, and presently a magnificent barge swept out of the crowd at the opposite landing, and advanced to where Manuel stood. It was propelled by twenty paddlers, and had a prow that rose up in the air in front, covered with gilding and carving, to a height

of at least twelve feet. Standing on a little hidden platform on the very top of this prow and leaning on a richly-ornamented spear, was a beautiful woman in a gorgeous dress, which at once recalled to Manuel all his ideas of the great Cleopatra.

The lady was nearly white, only the faintest tint of olive marking the difference of her race from the Europeans. In fact, she was no darker than Manuel himself, hardly so dark. Her face revealed her ancestry perfectly. It had all the severe regularity of feature, with a soft sensuousness of outline that marks the face of the mysterious Sphinx and the granite Memnon. The long almond-shaped eyes, large dark and swimming, the full red lips, the firm round chin, the oval face, framed in heavy masses of black hair, straight and silky, glistening blue in the sun, all were purely Egyptian. The hood-like head-dress of gold cloth, gleaming with jewels, and crowned with a single white ostrich feather, the long robes that left the arm bare to the shoulder, and revealed the feet in front, while trailing far behind, proclaimed the high rank of the lady; and Saki, the Baboola interpreter, whispered to Manuel:

"It is Queen Lalamina, the queen of yonder city. She is a great queen among the Maimounides."

Manuel had no time to inquire the meaning of his words, when the gorgeous barge swept up close to him, and the beautiful queen stood looking at him with a strange glance, mingled of curiosity, admiration and distrust.

Manuel was a handsome young fellow enough, by this time. He was about nineteen, and his mustache was quite respectable. He had dressed himself in a handsome sporting dress of dark velvet that day, on purpose to look imposing, thinking to overawe half-civilized men. The dress stood him in good stead with this exquisitely beautiful lady. She looked at him with surprise, and opening her beautiful lips, addressed him in a strange tongue, which seemed to be composed entirely of quids and vowels, as it fell from her mouth. But, unfortunately, Manuel could not understand a word, and was compelled to turn for assistance to the wild Baboola, who acted as interpreter.

Saki, the one who understood the queen, swelled with importance as he translated into his own gibberish, and Toka, the second interpreter, was even more important in his own capacity, though still in mortal terror of the Elephant Riders over the river, with the strange engines of war.

"The queen of Lamphis salutes you," he translated; "and wants to know wherefore you come by the pass, never before trod by stranger in fifty years."

"Tell her," said Manuel, impulsively, "that I came to see those beautiful eyes of hers, whose fame has gone over the whole world."

Queen Lalamina smiled when she heard it.

CHAPTER XX.

QUEEN LALAMINA.

QUEEN LALAMINA smiled as the Baboola interpreter gave her the message from Manuel's lips. It was an audacious fib, but it had leaped to Manuel's tongue before he knew what he said, and it produced a good effect. The queen looked upon Manuel, and, much to his surprise, addressed him in excellent Arabic, which she had first heard him speak.

"The young stranger is too bold. Does he not know the laws of the Maimonides? It is death for any one of the outer world to cross the river of the north, unmasked. It is only as a slave that he can cross it, even by invitation."

"Consider me, then, as your slave, lovely Lalamina," said Manuel, eagerly; "or rather as your friend, who can help you in your wars with the Felatahs, show you how to make guns, and teach you all the wisdom of the world."

Again the queen smiled, this time contemptuously.

"There is no wisdom in the world, outside of the children of Memnon," she said. "Twenty thousand years ago there were Farons in Soraphis, and we were kings of the world then."

This was all enigmatic to Manuel, except that he understood that the queen was "blowing," to use Bullard's expression.

"Can the children of Memnon bring yonder city here to us, so that one can count the stones in the walls?" he asked, pointing to the city of Lamphis, about half a mile off, and adjusting his telescope as he spoke.

"Nay," assented the queen; "no more canst thou."

"Behold, then," said Manuel, and he handed her the telescope, guessing at the similarity of their eyesight. It so happened that he was right. The beautiful queen took the telescope without a sign of fear, looked through it at the city, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"It is close by," she cried. "I can tell the faces on the walls. This is a wonderful instrument."

"And can your people make the lightning weapons of the Felatahs?" pursued Manuel, slinging his telescope again.

"We do not wish to," answered the queen, haughtily. "It is not the custom of the Maimonides to war with evil spirits, and steal flames from the place of torment."

"And yet," said Manuel, "if one were to come to you and show you how to make weapons that would throw fire, and show you that there was no mystery in it, but only a compound of three things, all of which are good for fire, you would not call it by such a name. I come from many moon's journey away from here, and my people can make bigger weapons than ever you saw. We have great guns that would hurl a mass of iron, as heavy as three men, from here, far over the walls of your city, and could bat-

ter it to pieces from where we stand, without going a foot nearer. I come from those people to see the queen of Lamphis, and offer her our friendship. She will do well not to reject it."

The queen listened attentively, and answered:

"For a stranger, you promise fairly, but how can I be sure of your words? Strangers came to our country once, many thousand years ago, when our fathers dwelt by the great river of the east, and they drove us from our own land. Till then we welcomed all strangers, but since then we have kept them out for our own safety."

"And you are right, great queen," said Manuel, who recognized the legend of the conquest of Egypt in her words. "But we come to dwell among you as friends, to become part of you, and to teach you how to conquer your enemies. Why should you treat us as enemies? You have had Arabs among you, or how could you have learned to speak their language?"

"I learned from my slave," said the queen, haughtily. "The children of Memnon learn all languages, and have slaves of all nations to teach them."

"Then let us be the first friends you admit," said Manuel, softly. "We want nothing from you but friendship, and we offer you power over all your enemies, and the knowledge of the great nations of the earth. You yourself, great queen, are but one among many. You have but one city. I could make you ruler over all the rest. Now you pay tribute to others. Then they will pay tribute to you."

He seemed to have struck the right chord—ambition—at last. Saki had told him that the Elephant Riders had kings and queens in each city, who had to pay tribute to the great Faron—evidently another word for Pharaoh—in the capital city of all. Queen Lalamina hesitated. Then she said:

"Send back your servants, that I may speak with you alone. You are, no doubt, a prince in your own country?"

"There are three of us," said Manuel; "and we belong to the princes of our own land, for we have no master."

"Let your brothers advance then," said the queen; "and send your men back."

Manuel ordered back his attendants, and beckoned forward Bullard and Curtis, who came up, dressed in their best clothes, and mounted on their fleet onagras. The queen gazed at them steadfastly, and seemed to be especially pleased with the bold, determined face of Tom Bullard. Manuel, in a few words, told them of what he had said, and then resumed his pleadings with the queen.

"We will teach you all we know," he said; "and show you how to make steel swords like these"—and he showed his own—"and we have with us three of the famous Sword Hunters, who can slay even an elephant with their blades, if you will only allow us to be your friends."

Queen Lalamina seemed not to hear him. She was looking at Tom Bullard. Suddenly she asked him:

"And what can you do, Prince Lion-face?"

Tom was surprised and flattered at the epithet. He was a shrewd fellow, and thought that a little bragging would do no harm.

"I can fight any twelve of your men," he said, laughing; "and kill them all, if you'll give me an open field."

The queen looked gravely at Manuel.

"Is Prince Lion-face jesting with us?" she asked, quite vexed; "or can he do what he says, Prince Ox-eye?"

Manuel smiled.

"He can do it easily. He, and each of us carries the life of twelve men in his girdle. And if you should trust to your elephants, we could put them to flight at once, from where we stand."

"And if I permit you to cross," said the queen, hesitatingly, "will you assist me against all my enemies, who are many?"

"We will," said Tom Bullard, boldly. "I'm the fellow who can show your men how to fight, and Jack, here, can help me."

The queen looked at them, doubtfully.

"You say you can put my elephants to flight from here," she said. "Let me see you do it, and I will believe you, and you shall be my friend. But my men must be free to shoot you, if they can. If you can show me what you say, I will trust you; if not, I will kill you all, except Prince Lion-face, and he shall be my slave."

The proposition was somewhat startling, for at the same minute the queen gave a signal to her paddlers, and the boat shot away over the river. It became necessary to fight at once.

But Manuel had been prepared for this. The caravan had already been headed round toward the summit of the pass, and, at a blast from Manuel's bugle, the whole line trotted off. It was just in time that they did so. There was heard the loud, hoarse blast of the great trumpet on the other side of the river, and the next moment a shower of huge arrows, shot from the cross-bows, rattled against the wall of rock behind them, proving that the range of the weapons was beyond that of a pistol, for the distance was at least two hundred yards. But if the range was good, the aim was poor, and the experience satisfied Manuel that he had not much to fear while in motion. While the caravan kept on, he turned round and surveyed his enemy. The camel-men were winding up the winches of the huge cross-bows again, an operation that consumed a great deal of time. Manuel halted, jumped off his onagras, drew up his rifle, and took deliberate aim at the middle of the line of elephants.

He had put a shell into his rifle, and saw it crack on an elephant's forehead, as soon as he had fired. Bullard and Curtis followed his example, sending shell after shell into the huge targets, and before

they had fired six rounds the effect became apparent. Although the distance was too great for the shells to penetrate deep enough to kill the elephants, they grew very uneasy, and as shot after shot pealed out, inflicting stinging wounds, they and their drivers alike grew frightened and unmanageable. First one great beast turned and dashed among his companions, mad with pain, and then the rest caught the panic, and rushed off toward the city, knocking over camel-men, cavalry, and everything in their way, and spreading a wild stampede. The rapid fire of breech-loading rifles, and the terrible rifle-shells, small and insignificant as they looked, put the whole of that formidable force to flight in a few minutes, for they were powerless to return a shot, save by the camel cross-bows, and the elephants had overturned these in their panic flight.

Manuel and his companions rode down again to the side of the river, and found nothing left to oppose them that they need fear at that distance. The cavalry and infantry were still there, but there were such indications of wavering among them, that Manuel felt convinced that a few shots would put them all to flight. These shots he was not going to fire. He had awed the Elephant Riders with his power, but he did not wish to excite their vengeance by killing a single man. He and his friends waited quietly at the ferry, and they had not long to wait. Before they had finished wiping out their rifle-barrels, the gorgeous barge swept out to meet them, and Manuel noticed that the paddlers all seemed to be in mortal terror, while the face of the queen was by no means as haughty as it had been.

"Now, great queen," cried Tom Bullard, "do you think we can cross the river, if we chose to, in spite of your army? Say the word, and we'll send the men into the city, after the elephants and camels."

"I believe your words," said the queen, with unwonted humility. "You have the powers of the gods, and can destroy us. We crave your friendship."

"You shall have it," said Manuel, courteously. "We offer it now as freely as before. Will you send over your boats to carry us across?"

"I will," said the queen. "Will not the Lion Prince enter my boat, to see it done?"

She indicated Bullard as she spoke, by a wave of her hand. Tom was delighted, for the queen's beauty had taken great hold on his susceptible heart, already. He stepped into the boat with alacrity, and was conducted by the beautiful queen to a seat under a canopy at the stern.

"Good-by, Jack!" he called out. "Good-by, Wisman! I'm going to be king of the country now, and marry Queen Lalamina."

And indeed it seemed not unlikely, for Queen Lalamina appeared to have fallen desperately in love with Tom at first sight. From that moment there was no more difficulty about crossing the river. Boats and barges came sweeping out by the dozen from the city of Lamphis, and the caravan of the Sword Hunters was ferried over to the further bank and taken to the water-stairs of the city. But they saw no more of Tom Bullard for a long time. The queen seemed to have taken possession of him, for good, and Manuel and Curtis felt not a little anxious.

They were reassured, however, by the magnificent reception that awaited them at Lamphis. Broad, massive staircases of stone led up from the water, and the travelers passed through lofty archways into a street that seemed made of palaces and temples. Sumptuously dressed guards awaited them in long lines, and they passed along over streets paved with marble, till they arrived in front of the "Palace of the Strangers," as they were informed it was called.

Here, surrounded by crowds of obsequious slaves, who waited on them as if they had been gods, they passed the rest of the afternoon, and still no news of Tom Bullard, and no sight of the queen. About an hour before sunset, however, they received an invitation to visit the queen, and, accordingly Manuel assumed his gayest dress, a military uniform, and Curtis attired himself in a handsome Turkish costume. Both armed themselves with their revolvers and sabers, and mounted their beautiful onagras, which were loaded with gorgeous trappings. Abou Hassan remained in charge of the caravan in the palace, with strict orders to allow no straggling away as yet, for Manuel felt a little uneasy at his position in the midst of a powerful city, the people of which might be treacherous foes, for all he knew. Selm and Abdallah accompanied the two friends, and they carried sabers and revolvers, so that Manuel felt safe against immediate treachery.

The little party found a large squadron of cavalry waiting for them in the street, men clothed in brazen armor of chain-work, with conical helmets and long lances.

The cavalry seemed to have been sent as a mark of compliment for an escort, for they fell in behind in regular order, and their commanding officer, in very good Arabic, told Manuel that he was sent to show them the way to the place.

They rode through streets, crowded with people in almost the same dress as that figured on the Egyptian sculptures thousands of years ago; and arrived at last at the entrance to the palace. This was grand beyond conception, a gateway of hewn stone nearly a hundred feet high, in front of a long avenue of sphinxes, which were backed by a second avenue of huge stone elephants with castles on their backs, the whole over a thousand feet long. Between the colossal statues were planted palm trees, which gave a pleasant shade; and at the end of the avenue was the pile of white marble buildings, which composed the palace of Queen Lalamina.

The friends dismounted at the doorway, which

was as large as a three-story house, and entered a grand hall, surrounded with columns, at the further end of which was a glittering assemblage of people gathered round a great white throne. As they entered, a burst of martial music filled the air, and the friends advanced to the throne.

What was their surprise to see there, by the side of the beautiful queen, their old friend Tom, glittering from head to foot in armor of gold chain-work, a plume of snowy feathers waving from his helmet, while the beautiful Lalamina's arm rested confidingly on his shoulder! The queen was so covered with jewels as to dazzle the eye, and the effect of the whole picture was startling.

"It's all up, fellers," said Tom, in his quaint English, with a comical look that sat poorly on his new dignity. "Tain't every day as a feller gets a queen to pop the question to him. I've been and gone and got married. She wouldn't take no for an answer, and says if you fellers want queens you can have 'em for the asking, if you'll only stop here, and teach 'em how to make guns and things. And a feller might do worse; say, now, couldn't he?"

Queen Lalamina spoke in Arabic, saying:

"My lord's friends are very welcome to stay with us as long as they like, and if they will help here, in our wars, they shall be kings also. I have spoken."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ENVOY.

The moon shone down on the city of Lamphis about three nights later, and every street was brilliantly illuminated with colored lanterns, while the people crowded the squares, and the sound of music came from all quarters. Lamphis was rejoicing over the marriage of Queen Lalamina to the wonderful white stranger who had come from afar with the terrible fire weapons.

It was in the midst of this rejoicing that our three friends were gathered in the grand banqueting hall of Queen Lalamina, the object of all the festivity.

Tom Bullard, metamorphosed into an Egyptian prince, was seated by Lalamina's side on the great white throne. Manuel sat on their right hand, and Curtis was on the left, while before them was spread the banqueting table, which accommodated five hundred guests at a time, and which was now full of the great lords of Lamphis, met to do honor to their queen's bridal feast.

The feast was nearly over, and a number of beautiful girls were dancing in slow, graceful movements to the music of golden harps, when a young nobleman in glittering armor, the officer of the queen's guard, glided softly through the crowd of slaves beside the throne, and handed the queen a letter.

It was a great square packet of papyrus, and covered with the same sort of characters which one now sees on the Egyptian monuments thousands of years old.

Queen Lalamina opened it, glanced over it, and handed it to Tom.

"Read, prince," she said, briefly, but her eye flashed and she looked as angry as only a queen used to absolute power can.

Tom gravely inspected the packet in silence. He turned over the leaves and looked at a long array of pictures of birds, beasts and human figures, of which of course he could not understand the full meaning. Still, being, as we have intimated, a sharp fellow, he made out a good deal of the general intention of the paper. At the head of the missive which excited Queen Lalamina's ire, was a great oval stamp, with the crowned head of a king in the center, surrounded with hieroglyphics. Tom had seen such seals in hundreds at Thebes and Memphis, and knew that they were called *cartouches*, being the names of the different kings who ordered certain inscriptions.

This cartouche was undoubtedly to tell who the letter came from. It was followed by some queer characters resembling men bowing, and then came the cartouche of Queen Lalamina herself, a very good profile likeness. Tom interpreted it to be, "King Somebody greets Queen Lalamina," and he was right.

What followed was not quite so clear, and you can see if you can make it out for yourselves as Tom did. He interpreted it to Curtis and Manuel very readily.

"Look here, fellows," said Tom, "somebody wants our scalps. You see that fellow running. That's a messenger who's brought news. You see these three chaps on donkeys. That's we, us and company. See the hats. Mr. Do-no-hoo has heard about us. What's this next? Oh, Jack, by Jove! if it isn't Lalamina hugging me! So he's heard that, too. Then, see here. That's a club, I guess."

"No," said Manuel, smiling; "that's a scepter, the symbol of command. It means, 'I order you to do something.' What is it he orders?"

Tom burst out laughing.

"Oh, Wiseman, look! He wants to give us rats. See here. There's a fellow carrying our three heads, and there are our bodies being chucked into the river. That's plain enough, I reckon. He wants the queen to throw us into the river and send him our heads. That's what I call cool."

All this while the beautiful queen sat looking at Tom with a strange expression. Pride, anger and love seemed to be struggling in her mind with some gnawing anxiety and fear, and she looked at Tom, full of wonder at his coolness.

"Well," she said, when he turned round, smiling, "do you understand it, my lord?"

"I think so," said Tom, coolly. "Some king wants you to kill us, and send him our heads. Isn't that it?"

"Yes," she said, shuddering, and passing one arm around his neck as if to shield him from dan-

ger; "but he shall not touch my prince while Lalamina lives."

"Who is the old fellow?" asked Tom, carelessly. "He writes such a shocking bad hand I can't make out his name."

Lalamina looked round in a manner half-apprehensive.

"Do you not know? It is from the great Faron himself, the great Sheshouk, who rules all the Maimonides."

"Indeed?" said Tom, coolly. "Well, then, I suppose we shall have to fight, my love. That is, if you think you don't want to give us up."

"No, never!" said the queen, shuddering. "If Lamphis must fall, I will fall with it; but my prince, my lion lord, shall only fall with me at his side."

"I see no need for any one falling, great queen," said Manuel, quietly. "With us to help you, the Faron may be beaten."

"Alas, you know him not," said the queen, sadly. "He can bring ten armies against our one, and five thousand elephants call him master."

"For all that," said Manuel, "we can beat him. How long will it be before he can attack us, if we fight?"

"In fifty days he would be before our walls."

"It is enough," said Manuel, calmly. "When we crossed the river, great queen, we promised to help you against your foes. Now is the time to redeem our promise. Make me your general; give me power to collect what I need, and to order your workmen, and I pledge you my word that when Sheshouk comes before these walls, it shall only be to his ruin. Will you trust me?"

The queen hesitated.

"Don't be afraid," said Tom, briskly. "I know old Wiseman, and we all do as he says. Only let me lead your cavalry, when the battle comes. We can beat the Faron all to pieces in one day."

Lalamina listened to Tom with sparkling eyes. She was wildly in love with her handsome young husband, and believed all he said, when Manuel's grave promises had no effect.

She rose to her feet, and spoke in a loud tone to the nobles at the board. Instantly all rose in silence.

"Open the doors," cried the beautiful queen in Arabic, so that her husband could understand her. The friends had found that Arabic was used in Lamphis by the upper classes, much as French is talked in England and America.

"The Faron Sheshouk of Sorapis has sent us word to slay our guests," said Lalamina, in a clear, cutting voice. "Nobles of Lamphis, you know how he has ground us down for years with tribute, and how his insolent tax-gatherers have taken all our wealth to feed his luxury. Now he adds to this the insult of asking me to slay my lord and husband, and to give up our guests to be sacrificed in Sorapis. He little knew who these guests were! Nobles of Lamphis, who of you will support his queen? Shall we bow to the Faron forever? Let us be bold at last, for we have the strangers from afar to help us, and let us throw off the yoke of the Faron forever!"

A shout of applause announced that the nobles of Lamphis supported their queen; and then, in the very midst of the shout, a tall, handsome man, arrayed in magnificent robes, swept into the room at the open door, followed by a glittering train.

It was the Faron's envoy!

The haughty noble glanced carelessly round the room, over which a great hush had fallen at his entrance, and then moved slowly and proudly up the room to the foot of the throne. It was evident that he was used to being obeyed and feared, for he met none but timid, averted glances, as he stared contemptuously from side to side.

Manuel, who was watching the whole scene with great keenness, could see that the Lamphians were used to being bullied, and that all their love for their queen could not hold them up against the moral effect of their ruler's presence in the person of the envoy.

Tom, who stood by Lalamina, could feel her tremble, and drew her arm through his own to support her.

Then the envoy approached the throne, and without any of the ordinary marks of reverence, for the first time looked up.

His eyes met those of the American new-made prince.

By a sudden inspiration it occurred to Tom that he were to address the envoy he might break the spell that seemed to be gathering over everybody, and encourage them all.

As the thought crossed his mind, he gently placed Lalamina on her seat again, and standing alone before the envoy, met his haughty gaze with one fierce and menacing, as he said in Arabic:

"Whose dog are you to come into the presence of the king of Lamphis without prostrating yourself? Down on your face, or I will have you whipped with rods, for I am king here!"

The effect of this fierce address was astounding. The cowering Lamphian nobles drew an audible shivering breath, and started half up, staring at the envoy as if they expected to see him within the speaker with a thunderbolt.

The envoy himself started back, divided between exasperation and blank amazement, almost choked with passion.

Then he recovered himself with a tremendous effort, and turned to his suite. Behind him were four gigantic negroes, each a perfect Hercules in muscular development, but totally unarmed and naked save for a gold fringe round the waist. Our friends afterward learned that they were the Faron's executioners, whom it was death to resist.

The envoy spoke in Arabic, in low tones of intense passion:

"I will show you who I am. Seize the three strangers and this wretched woman who dares to disobey Sheshouk, the Faron."

The four executioners bowed to the earth before the envoy. Then each turned to a waiting slave behind, and took from him a pair of shackles, with which they were about to advance.

"Now, fellows," cried Tom, in English, drawing both his pistols, "this is your time to cow these niggers."

In a moment Manuel and Jack Curtis had risen, a pistol in each hand.

"Drop those shackles and leave the room," said Tom, sternly, to the executioners, as they advanced.

He was answered by a hoarse laugh of scorn, as the huge fellows, not even hurrying their pace, came toward him. Evidently they were not used to being resisted, and had never seen a pistol before.

"One at a time," said Tom, coolly. Then he leveled at the broad breast of the leader and shot him through the heart.

The sound of the shot caused a shriek of surprise from every one in the hall, save the followers of the Americans, who were gathered near the throne. Then on a sudden Abou Hassan rushed forward, crying in Arabic:

"Leave the dogs to me, white brothers."

In a moment the Arab's sword flashed through the air and another executioner fell, cut in half at the waist. The other two, as if struck by lightning, uttered a howl of dismay, and fell prostrate before the throne.

But it would be hard to picture the face of the envoy as he saw the instant destruction which had overtaken the dreaded executioners of the Faron.

He glared round at his suite, where there were some twenty armed men, then at the amazed Lamphian nobles, then at the bold strangers who had defied him to his face. There they stood, the dark, fierce Hamraus, the grinning Baboola, Saki, the stolid Egyptian servant and Mohammed the dragon-man, all looking ready to meet him without fear, and waiting for the word. The hall was full of armed Lamphian soldiers on guard and it was evident he had no chance in a struggle.

By a great effort he controlled his rage and spoke to Queen Lalamina in the language of the Maimonides.

Before he had said three words Tom interrupted him in Arabic.

"Silence, dog. Will you dare address a king's wife in the king's presence? I am king of Lamphis. Speak to me."

At this Lalamina, who had been sitting shuddering beside him, spoke in a low tone of great relief:

"Yes, Rah Hotep, it is true. He is king now. I have given the kingdom to him."

Rah Hotep turned on the new prince proudly.

"It is well," he said, in Arabic. "I will speak to you, rebel and traitor. You have defied the Faron and insulted his envoy. Before fifty days have rolled away not one stone of Lamphis shall be left unturned, and you shall be impaled."

He was turning away, when Tom stepped down and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Tell your master," said Tom, fiercely, "that he is a dog and son of a dog. I am no subject of his, but a *prince*, come to take away his kingdom from him. Go."

The last words seemed to pierce the mask of pride which had sustained Rah Hotep so long, for his countenance fell.

There was a prophecy, as our friends afterward learned, that a stranger should overthrow the Faron, and rule the Maimonides, some day.

Rah Hotep regained his composure in a moment.

"Dogs bark," he said, sententiously. "Lions tear. In fifty days the lions will tear you."

Then he signed to his suite and strode away, leaving the two dead executioners lying at the foot of the throne.

No sooner was he out of the room than Lalamina threw herself at her husband's feet, embracing his knees.

"You are my lion king, and I adore you," she said.

And all the nobles gave a shout of joy, and crowded round to kiss the hands and feet of the white strangers who came to promise them freedom.

CHAPTER XXII.

PREPARATIONS.

A few weeks later Lamphis was in a flutter of excitement. Outside the walls a little army was mustering, and the Lion King, as our Tom was called now, was to lead it against the army of the Faron, which was coming from Sorapis, with the forces of fifteen cities, to overwhelm Lamphis.

Manuel had been hard at work during that time, assisted by Jack Curtis; for Tom had appointed him prime minister, and obeyed his counsel in everything. The lessons of superior civilization had borne great fruit among the already highly civilized Maimonides. Manuel found them to be skillful metal workers in brass, copper and iron; and at once set them to work to manufacture some cannon.

He knew that such fine work as muskets was beyond their reach in the time they had, but copper and brass castings were easily made. He soon had thirty or forty short, wide-mouthed pieces constructed and bored smooth. He concluded that these would be most effective against the heavy, dense bodies of troops which the Faron used, like the old Egyptians.

Carriages for these were easily constructed, and gunpowder was manufactured under Manuel's orders, the sulphur being taken from the crater of the extinct volcano they had noticed when entering the Hidden Country.

Cannon-balls were cast in abundance, but Manuel placed his great dependence on grape and canister, of which he had enough made to load five wagons for each gun.

While Manuel attended to the foundries it was Curtis's part to drill the Lamphians soldiers with dummy pieces to the use of the cannon. As fast as a real one was turned out it was harnessed and drilled with, and the soldiers displayed as much delight as school-boys at their new pieces.

But Manuel was careful not to let the secret of those weapons get out, for fear of warning the enemy, whom he knew to be ten to one in numbers. He and his friends mixed all the powder themselves, and only allowed the workmen to handle it when mixed, the mill being erected across the river from Lamphis. The quantity required was so great that it required extreme caution in handling, to prevent accidents.

Here our friends found their Egyptians and Arabs invaluable, they being used to firearms, and forming excellent instructors in the simpler maneuvers of artillery, which the quick-witted Lamphians picked up very rapidly.

As for Tom, he was at work drilling the cavalry to rapid movements, and increasing its force. The friends concluded that, since they could only get together about twenty thousand men anyway, while the Faron mustered nearly two hundred thousand spears, it was best to keep their infantry in the city, and fight a battle outside the walls, with nothing but guns and horsemen, so that, if defeated, they could retreat without molestation from slow infantry, and trust to a siege to beat off the enemy.

And meanwhile, day and night, the people of Lamphis were turning out guns and shot, and filling their magazine with powder, till they had a train of twenty-four guns in the field, and a hundred more twice as large mounted on the ramparts.

And then at last, one glorious morning, the Lion King rode out of Lamphis, followed by a glittering group of officers, while Manuel bore the baton of general of the army, and Jack Curtis rode proudly in front of the clattering, rumbling train of artillery.

Queen Lalamina was near her husband, mounted on a splendid chariot; and the cavalry followed, divided into squadrons of a hundred each, and numbering ten thousand horsemen.

The couriers from the frontiers had brought in news that the Faron's army was at hand, and that the nearest city, which had been friendly till then, had shut its gates and shot arrows at the couriers of Lalamina.

"Now, Wiseman," said Tom, gravely, as they rode at the head of the troops, "don't believe I'm such an ass as to think I know more than you, because I've married a queen. I want you to give all the orders, old boy, and I promise to obey them, because you know your business. All I want is to have the cavalry, and for you tell me when to charge."

"I'll tell you that now," said Manuel. "When I get them into confusion with the grape, then you shall sin and cut them to pieces, but stop and come back when you hear me fire a single gun after a pause."

"All right, old fellow," said the Boy King, and away he galloped to the side of Lalamina's chariot. The queen would not go back. She had determined to see the battle and share her husband's fate, whatever it was, and the Faron's army was within three hours' march of the head of the column.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GREAT FIGHT.

A DENSE column of dust in the distance announced the coming of the Faron's army, as Manuel gave the signal for the Lamphians to halt.

The theater of the coming battle was a great plain about four miles wide, and dotted over with clumps of great trees like a park, and which fed herds of giraffes and antelopes as tame as sheep. It was one of the great game preserves of the Faron himself, between the cities of Rametho and Bubaris, rivals of Lamphis, which stood at about twelve miles apart, the towers of Rametho plainly visible to the left at the edge of the plain.

"We couldn't get a better position than this," said Manuel, as Tom rode up to him to consult. "The Faron will probably attack in great masses, hoping to crush us by his weight, and these plains will enable us to maneuver our horse and inclose his flanks."

The little Lamphian army was drawn up at the edge of a gentle hill that overlooked the plain, and the artillery was brought to the front. It was divided into four batteries of six guns each, two being placed in front of the center, and one on each wing, where Manuel and Jack Curtis commanded each a body of about two thousand cavalry, all lancers, clad in armor of chain-work. In the center was the new King of Lamphis, with Lalamina in her chariot beside him, and twelve guns looking grimly out on the foe, while behind him towered the solid squadrons of all the rest of the heavy horsemen.

There they stood, patiently waiting the coming of the enemy that was hidden by that great cloud of dust.

In front of the little army a number of light-armed horsemen, led by Abou Hassan and his brothers, were galloping out to meet and attack the enemy.

On they came, and soon, through the dust, they could see the gleam of armor, and presently a few scattering shots told that Abou Hassan and the few Egyptians were firing off their muskets. But it did not seem to have much effect on the enemy, as a

fierce shout replied, and the handful of light horse came galloping in a moment later, pursued by a cloud of mounted archers shooting arrows.

It was only the sight of the glittering squadrons of the Lamphians that checked the victorious Maimonides, who must have been at least three thousand strong; and they slowly and sullenly retired, after shooting a volley of arrows that fell short of their mark.

Manuel had forbidden a shot to be fired before he gave the signal, or the venturesome archers would have paid dear for that volley, for they had come within a hundred and fifty yards of the guns.

As the archers retired, they drew off to the right and left, and disclosed the head of a broad column of foot soldiers, with long lances and great square shields. These men came tramping steadily forward till within about two hundred yards, when they halted.

Manuel had ridden up to Tom, leaving his wing to the charge of Abou Hassan. When he saw the spearmen halt he smiled.

"If they'll only bring all their army up there," he observed, "I don't know that we need grumble, for they are just within range of our grape-shot to spread well."

"We mustn't let too many come on, though," said Tom, looking down the lines of his own guards. "The Faron's got a grist of men, and these Lamphians are so used to thinking him irresistible that a very little will cow them. If those fellows gave a good yell and charged, it's my belief half our men would turn tail."

"We must encourage them then," said Manuel. "Ask your wife to make them a speech. Tell them that we are only waiting to get the whole army together to blow them to pieces, and that we're afraid they'll run away if we begin too soon."

"By Jove, not a bad idea," said Tom, heartily.

"It takes you, old boy, to tell us what to do."

And a few minutes later a loud cheer from the Lamphians proclaimed that the news encouraged them in the very nick of time. And now Manuel sat on his swift onager in front of the line, steadily watching the enemy as body after body of spearmen, each arranged in a dense square mass, marched forward and ranged itself in grim silence beside the first phalanx. Manuel counted a hundred shields in front of one of these bodies, and as it turned to take its place in line its depth was equal to its front. Ten thousand men were in each of these great phalanxes, and eight of them came marching up and halted in front of the Lamphians.

They looked terrible in their vast masses, and the long thin lines in which the Lamphians were drawn up seemed quite useless to stop them when they chose to advance, but the Maimonides had halted without so much as a trumpet sound, and seemed to be waiting for something.

Manuel guessed what that something was. It was the presence of the Faron.

On came the huge masses of infantry, till twelve of them had halted, and still the slender lines of the Lamphians stretched far to the right and left of them, for where the Maimonides had a hundred ranks the Lamphians had only four, the rear ones some distance apart from the front.

There was heard a great shouting in the rear, and a huge cloud of dust as a great mass of elephants came trotting up through a gap that had been left in the center of the Faron's line. In the very front, mounted on a gorgeous golden howdah, borne by two elephants harnessed side by side, sat a man with a long black beard. His body glittered all over with jewels, and his head was crowned with a plumed diadem.

"Now's your time, Tom! That's the Faron! Give it to him with the guns!" cried Manuel, as he shook his rein and galloped off down the line to give the signal.

It was not a moment too soon. The Faron was waving his scepter, the elephants were moving forward to crush everything beneath their feet, the spearmen raised a tremendous shout, clashing their spears and shields, and only two hundred yards divided the armies.

As Manuel galloped to his batteries he could see his cavalry was wavering, and that a feather might turn the scale. Then there was a great crash, as the twelve guns of Tom's big battery, loaded to the muzzle with grape-shot, stones, pieces of waste copper, and all sorts of rubbish, poured forth their deadly volley into the midst of the mass of elephants.

The effect was terrible. The whole crowd fell into confusion. The Faron's howdah was upset and the monarch flung to the earth. With wild shrieks of pain and dismay, the frightened elephants recoiled and broke to the right and left, trampling down the men in the phalanx like insects. In another moment the batteries on the right and left wings opened their fire, tearing broad lanes through the helpless masses of infantry wedged in solid array.

The army of the Maimonides stood and wavered to and fro as if struck helpless. A moment later the terrible cannon began to fire singly as fast as the artillerymen could load them, and their fire was directed on the dense masses of infantry and the struggling elephants. Before the fire had lasted ten minutes, with a great wall of terror and dismay the whole of the vast array wavered to and fro, broke, and finally dispersed into a ruined, panic-stricken mass of fugitives, streaming over the plain.

Up comes Manuel to the new king at a gallop.

"Now's your time, Tom," he cried. "Charge and cut them to pieces, while I limber up and follow. Take the Faron if you can. He's worth all the rest."

"Ay, ay, old fellow." A moment later the wave of horsemen swept forward, and the battle was no longer a battle but a rout and a massacre.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

THE history of our Sword Hunters is almost over. We might tell how the Faron of the Maimonides was taken prisoner, compelled to resign his crown, and how the other cities elected the Lion King, as Tom Bullard was now called, to be their new Faron.

Manuel and Jack were treated like princes, and might have married any one out of a dozen queens. But Manuel got tired of the country first after about two years. He had a fortune at home and longed to see his native land and be at home once more.

He and Jack finally agreed to leave together, and Bullard, the new Faron, loaded them with presents to take home. He preferred to stay himself, more especially as he had two children, and didn't propose to leave a throne and go back to work for a living.

"Tell uncle John I'm all hunk," he said, in parting, "and if he'll come over here, I'll treat him like a king."

But uncle John never did come. He was dead when they reached America, and had left all his property to a girl whom he married at sixty. So Tom did a wise deed to stay in Africa.

Manuel and Jack crossed the Zahara and reached Algiers in safety. They both agreed never to disclose the mystery of the whereabouts of the Hidden Country, and they both kept their word. No one to this day knows where it is, but Manuel and Jack, who are now living in America and happily married, and it was from them that your friend who writes this learned the history of the SWORD HUNTERS.

THE END.

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